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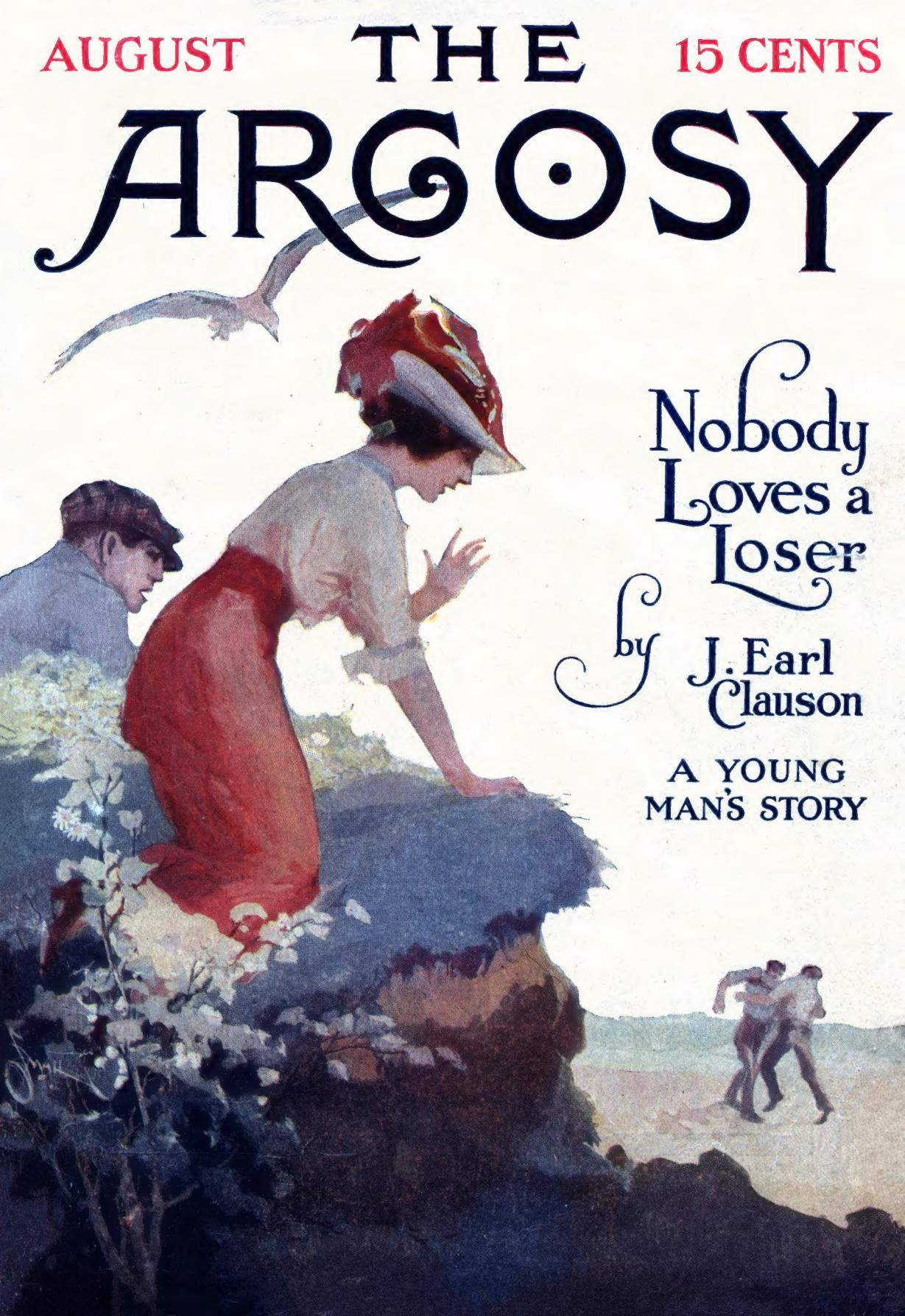

Nobody Loves a Loser

by J. Earl Clauson

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THE ARGOSY

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GORHAM SILVER POLISH—THE BEST FOR CLEANING SILVER

THE ARGOSY

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Nobody Loves a Loser

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(A FULL BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL COMPLETE.)

CHAPTER I.

KNOCKED OUT.

THE roar of the crowd reached Sam Levine in his tucked-up office in a far corner of the vast building as miles inland may be heard the low rumble of the surf. He pulled out a big, gold watch, glanced at it carelessly, and leaned back in his chair jingling the fob seals, a complacent smile lighting his strong face.

His labors for the night were over. He had assisted at the counting of the box-office receipts, which had revealed a highly satisfactory return for the labors that had preceded this evening. His private wagers had been profitably laid and systematically recorded. Remained only the outcome of the battle.

Barring accidents, it was a great night for Sam Levine. It not only carried him into the first rank as a judge of ring material, but it set his feet firmly on the highway to fortune. And money was not dross.

There had been hours when he had questioned the wisdom of the policy of concentrating all his managerial activities on Jack Garrett. That the young man had the makings of a top-notcher he never doubted. Pluck, science, strength—they stood out as obvious as the muscles of his arms and chest, or the cords which helped to make him lightning fast.

They were so clearly defined, in short, and so successfully carried into practise that the manager, yielding to the speculative instinct of his race, had

finally plunged and laid his all on this single hope. Thus far he had not been disappointed. Why, then, should the gnawing worm of distrust find lodgment in his bosom?

It was because—because—well, he could not define it. Was it because the Navigator, as his admirers termed him, was too much of a gentleman?

He shrugged his shoulders, inserted a bone-dry cigar between his strong, slightly yellowed teeth, and as the footsteps of a watchman on his rounds drew near the half-open door, yielded to the desire for human intercourse.

"Have a smoke," he offered. "Why ain't you watching the fight?"

"Fat chance I've got to be watchin' fights," grumbled the other, accepting the cigar and putting it in his pocket. "There's time-clocks to be pulled every half-hour, ain't there? And if there's any way to fool a time-clock, I ain't wise to it. But I sh'd think you'd be there with bells on."

"Me see a fight?" Levine rejoined scornfully. "For why would I want to see men beat one another up? I've got troubles of my own."

"Gee, ain't that funny, though!" was the watchman's comment. "Here you could have th' swellest seats in th' house and watch them pound one another's blocks off without it costin' you a cent, and 'stead o' that—"

Levine waved the subject aside with a hand on which a large diamond glittered conspicuously.

"Now if it's Chinese vases you're talking about," said he, "that's something else again. A Chinese vase is—well, it's a Chinese vase. But prize-fighting don't excite me none after the door receipts are counted. I'd sooner watch a gang of men putting in a plate-glass window."

The watchman shook his head in testimony of his total inability to read sense into such a statement.

"This Navigator's some fighter," he remarked. "How do you pick 'em like that if you don't like to see 'em fight?"

"Prize-fighting is with me a business, not a recreation," the manager explained. "Should a man know his own business? I see them fight when I want to find out what they can do, but after that—" He shrugged his shoulders. "But you're right about the Navigator being some fighter."

"Say," the watchman burst out, "is that straight about him being in th' navy?"

"Sure it's straight," Levine declared. He became enthusiastic on the subject of his find. "Y' see, it was like this. A friend of mine tips me off there was a what's this — bluejacket, that's it—a bluejacket on the Brandywine that was knocking them all cold.

"Ever hear of 'happy hours?' That's what they call it in the navy when everybody lays off work and the bluejackets box with one another on deck. Pound th' face off one another, y' understand, and call it happy hours. Perhaps that's funny—I dunno. Anyway, that's where Jack Garrett learned how to handle his fists. He was the happiest little happy-hourer of his weight in the whole navy.

"When his time was up I was there waiting for him. We signed up with one another right off. And—there you are. I saw he had the makings, and I made him."

The watchman listened to this romantic tale with flattering interest. In the satisfaction of his achievement, Sam Levine's chest had swelled, his eyes brightened, and his mood became expansive.

"Some fighter—I guess he is," he murmured. "You hear me — he's booked to be a champ."

"Th' boys was sayin'," the watchman remarked, "that him and th' belt-holder was goin' to sign up if he beats this here Butch Horlock. Is that so?"

"I ain't saying it is, y'understand, nor yet I ain't saying it isn't," Levine replied. "He's good enough, ain't he? After he gets a decision over Horlock, who is there has a better right to take a go at the champ? Ask me that."

"Sure thing," the watchman agreed. He read a direct statement into the manager's words. "An' th' boys was sayin' that him and th' Butcher didn't love one another any, neither. They said—"

He hesitated, uncertain how far to repeat the myriad rumors that wing their way from training-camp. Levine waited for him to continue.

"Well, they said there was a girl," the watchman went on. "A girl that the Navigator and Butch Horlock was bot' sweet on, and that th' fight tonight would be for blood."

"A girl?" Levine repeated angrily. "What for talk is this? Who told you such things?"

"I dunno, only you hear stories like that. Prob'ly there's nothin' to it. Fine weather we been havin' this week, but she's fixin' for a storm."

The manager was not to be sidetracked from the new line of thought the watchman had opened. Certain other vague suggestions he had received had given birth to the disquiet which marred his peace of mind.

"What's this about a girl?" he demanded. "First I'd heard of it. Who is she? What do you know about it, anyway?"

"Well, I heard somethin' from a friend of mine that's doorman at the Buckingham Theayter," said the other reluctantly. "Where 'Bung Voyage' is runnin'—you know. He says he's seen th' Navigator up there nights waitin' around for this here skirt after th' show. Why, he says he seen him only last night."

On the edge of an explosion, Levine checked himself. Instead, he inquired with an offhand air:

"Did you hear what the girl's name was?"

"Some fancy name—let me see. It was—it was—I got it. It was Vesta Dawn. Prob'ly her real name's Mamie Gilhooley — you know how them things are. My friend says she's a swell looker. Friend of Butch Horlock's, too."

"The Butcher knows her, eh?"

"My friend—his name is Steve Brannigan—says it was Butch that knew her first. Then th' Navigator got her away. 'T least, that's what I heard."

"And Jack Garrett was there last night?"

"Course Steve might of been mistook. Well, I got to beat it and go pull my clock."

He departed, leaving Sam Levine to his previous occupations of rocking back and forth in his swivel chair and jingling his fob seals. But the expression of complacent contentment with which he had received his caller had given place to one of troubled concern.

Of a sudden the intermittent clamor from the ringside rose to new altitudes. It seemed to beat and surge around the door of Levine's office as if clamoring for admission. Its long continuance hinted at an event of world-wrecking import. Levine glanced at his watch.

Footsteps sounded in the passage, followed by a timid knock at the door. It was opened hesitatingly on Levine's invitation to enter.

A snub-nosed, freckled youth in a striped Jersey, frayed trousers and canvas shoes made his appearance. His manner was that of one who carries ill-tidings.

"Well, Mac, how many rounds?" Levine cried.

"Seven, sor," replied Mac.

His eyes shifted unsteadily under the other's direct gaze, and he clung to the door-knob as if deriving moral support therefrom.

"Seven, eh? I told him to let it go eight or nine, but the crowd won't kick on seven if they were lively. Was it a knockout?"

"You may well say so, sor," replied Mac with some show of relief at the turn the conversation was taking. "Th' Navigator is but just now coming around."

The effect of his last words on Levine was electrical. His air of com-

placency forsook him in a flash. Gripping the arms of his chair, he bent forward, fairly shouting:

"What's that you say? The Navigator? Jack Garrett?"

Mac quailed beneath his black look. Getting a firmer hold on the door-knob, he managed to say:

"Why, yes, sor. I t'ought you'd heard. He was clean knocked out."

"Jack Garrett—knocked out? What are you talking about? You mean that Butch Horlock was knocked out. You've been drinking again."

"Sorra th' dhrop, sor," Mac declared stoutly. "'Tis mesilf was as surprised as you. But th' lad wasn't himself th' night. He was game, but that slow you'd never believe. He acted like a man that's been doped."

"Doped!" The word came in a snarl from Sam Levine's lips. His face was contorted into a black scowl. "Jack Garrett knocked out, and acted like he was doped! Come over here where I can see you." He rose from his chair. "Now tell me that again. Are you sure it was Horlock and not Jack that got that decision?"

Mac advanced two steps nearer the drop-light over the desk, eying Levine fearsomely. The door he left ajar in case of need. Fortified by the knowledge that this avenue of escape was open, he elaborated his previous statement.

"How c'u'd I be mistaken, sor," said he, "an' me at th' ringside and all? I see at th' start-off he wasn't workin' right to-night. Butch was savager than ever I see him before. Jack begun t' stall in th' second, an' by th' fourt' I c'u'd see how 'twas goin'.

"They was infightin' just before th' finish. Th' referee separated them, but Jack acted like he didn't know where he was. I don't know for sure what only 'twas a body blow, an' it laid him cold. An'—an' that's all, sor."

Having delivered himself, he backed to the door and regained his grip on the knob.

Sam Levine was forced at length to believe in the incredible. His wrath broke bounds. He pushed back his chair and, while the timorous Mac shrank across the threshold, paced up and down, seeking in language relief for his feelings.

It was a good two minutes before the storm subsided. Then, a little ashamed of himself, he halted beside the desk and turned again to his retainer.

"Where is he now?" he demanded.

"Jack? Sure, th' rubber will be workin' over him," the attendant replied, adding with a view to pacification: "He's not marked up much—they was infightin' more than half th' time."

"Go and tell him I want to see him just as soon as he can get here," the manager ordered.

"It'll be some time, sor," Mac warned. "He'll have to be fixed up, an' dress, an'—"

Levine interrupted.

"Get out of here and do as I tell you. I don't care if it's a week, I will wait here till he comes."

With a mumbled word of acquiescence and a smothered sigh of relief, Mac withdrew, closing the door behind him as softly as if it had been the portal to a magazine filled with high explosives. After he had departed Sam Levine resumed his chair.

For half an hour he sat brooding, elbows on knees, dark eyes fixed blankly on the floor. His unlighted cigar was gradually reduced to a fragment between his strong jaws.

He was piecing together odds and ends of rumors, for his previous inattention to which he now cursed himself. Square himself, had he trusted too far to the squareness of his protégé?

Was it true that he had been neglectful of training? That he had fallen a prey to the many temptations which beset the fighting man? And this story about a girl—that was the most disquieting rumor of all.

One course, and only one, suggested itself. He spat out the torn fragments of his dry smoke and started another. That also had been nearly consumed when his office door was flung wide without preliminaries and Jack Garrett, entering, dropped into the visitor's chair.

An air of recklessness was plain in his carriage. He crossed his legs, eased himself back, and flung Levine a careless, unsmiling:

"How are you, Sam? They said you wanted to see me."

CHAPTER II.

RUPTURED RELATIONS.

INSTEAD of replying immediately, Levine subjected his visitor to a long scrutiny.

Jack Garrett in street clothes revealed himself as a handsome, curly-headed youth of twenty-three, careful as to his attire. He was of the lean-flanked, square-shouldered, classic type.

His clean-cut features were just now heavy with a hint of sullenness. The only visible reminder of his late encounter was a slightly swelled ear, although the manner in which he adjusted himself to his seat suggested hidden bruises.

He returned his manager's gaze with a defiant stare, at length breaking out with:

"Well, what about it? Mac said you wanted to see me. What's up?"

"I told him to," said Levine curtly. He was carrying a check-rein on his temper. "What's the matter that you lost to-night?"

"Well, what of it?" came the swift reply. "You don't expect a fellow to win every fight, do you? Who ever did?"

But that Levine had taken care that his wrath should burn to ashes before this interview, which he foresaw would prove as distasteful to him as to the fighter, he would have been tempted to make heated response to this sally. Its manner was outspoken challenge. With marvelous forbearance he said:

"Should we be talking ancient histories? I sent for you to say that you lost to-night, and you had no right to lose."

The Navigator squared his shoulders angrily.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded. "What do you mean by saying I had no right to lose?"

"What do I mean?" Levine repeated. "Should I mean something I am afraid to say? If you were the manager and the backer and there were no bets, it might be you would have the right to lose. But the business is not like that. It isn't like you were winning or losing for yourself only. Look at me. I lose it, five thousand dollars to-night. Is that a joke, I ask you?"

"When it comes to that I'm not a heavy winner myself," the Navigator stated.

"I know you ain't, Jack," said Levine quietly.

Jack Garrett's none too even temper, jarred by the evening's experience, flared up beyond reason.

"You know I ain't?" he mocked. "Of course you know I ain't. You know me too well to think I'd sell you out—or is that what you called me in here for? To accuse me?"

"Nothing of such a sort," Levine answered with perfect coolness. "Let us talk like gentlemen. I said you had no right to lose to-night, and again I say it."

"Fourteen months I have managed you. When you left the navy I showed you how to make more money in a night than you earned there in a year. Is that true?"

"I wasn't the only one to make money out of our contract," Garrett returned sulkily.

"Should you be? Would I for my health hunt up a sailor from the navy and spend money and time? I am a business man."

The other pulled out his watch and glanced at it.

"I'm sorry, Sam," said he. "But the fact is, I have an engagement, and if you'd get to where you're trying to get to and let me go I'd be much obliged."

Sam Levine bent forward, lifted a stubby forefinger, and shot at the youth the stern question:

"Why did you lose that fight to-night?"

The Navigator was obviously taken aback by the bluntness of the interrogation. A hint of accusation in the manager's manner rendered him uneasy. After a moment of stammering hesitation, when he was undecided whether to bluster or remain calm, he decided on the latter course.

"Why did I lose it?" he said. "Why, because Butch Horlock is the better man, I suppose."

"You—you call yourself a fighter, and say that," came from Levine, who momentarily lost self-control. "No, that is not the answer. He is not so good a fighter."

"Then suppose you tell me why. You seem to know more about it than I do."

"I know this," declared the manager with emphasis—"that you should have had the fight on ice from the tap of the bell. You ought to have been able to put him to sleep any round after the third. Do I know this game? Twenty years I have followed it. Let alone accidents and crooked work, I can judge between fighters. And I know that you ought to have won a decision over the Butcher. Why didn't you?"

Garrett hesitated briefly. On the point of answering, he was silenced by the stubby forefinger.

"You know, but you will not tell," Levine declared. "Who is Vesta Dawn?"

Whether the flush which rose to Jack Garrett's face at the mention of the name was of anger or embarrassment it would have been difficult to say. Certainly its introduction into the dialogue was a tremendous surprise, for he believed he had kept this phase of his life well concealed from his manager. After an instant's hesitation he stammered:

"Wh—who's who?"

"Who is Vesta Dawn?" Levine said again. "The show-girl in 'Bung Voyage' that you wait for at the stage door? The one you were out with last night?"

The young man sprang wrathfully to his feet, the chair clattering to the floor behind him.

"Now, that'll be about all, Mr. Levine," said he. "You may be my manager, but you've no right to spy on me outside of business, and I tell you flat I won't stand it. I suppose you've been sticking around the stage door of the Buckingham yourself."

"Sit down!" ordered Levine tersely. "It is true, then, that you've been breaking training for the biggest fight I ever signed you up for? You throw me down for a show-girl?"

"I tell you it's none of your business," Garrett stormed. "What is it to you who my friends are? If that's what you called me in here to talk about, I'm off; and if it's any satisfaction to you to know it, I'm going to see Vesta Dawn."

"Not yet you ain't," said Levine. "You tell me it ain't none of my business. It ain't none of my business, I suppose, that you lose me five thousand dollars on to-night? It ain't none of my business that Butch Horlock has a go at the champ instead of you? If that ain't my business, tell me what is. I ask you."

For perhaps a half minute the two men glared angrily at one another. The atmosphere of the little office was tense with possibilities of violence. Then Levine resumed command of himself.

"Listen, Jack," he commanded. "I've managed you ever since you broke into the ring. I haven't always matched you with men you could easy

whip. I wouldn't go to spoil you like that. But till to-night I always knew whether you or the other fellow was going to win.

"To-night was the biggest fight you have had. It meant money right away now, and a lot more later. If you had won, as you had ought to have, you could have had a match with Monk Reilly, and Sam Levine says that you could beat him. Now—it's all off."

"Well, what about it?" Garrett broke in hoarsely. The red flush, now plainly enough of anger, had mounted to his forehead.

"Five thousand dollars I lost on you to-night, and I'm willing to forget it if you give me your word to drop whatever it was that made you lose. You know, and so do I. Do you say yes?"

"And if not?"

"If not — we quit, here and now. Should I be wasting my time and money on a fellow who doesn't run straight? You know that I'm on the square, but it would be easy for them to pass the word that I play to lose. I won't risk it. I like you, but business is business, and friendship ain't business. I'm talking business now."

Hot-headed youth is disinclined to weigh a choice. Before Jack Garrett's mental vision arose the image of Vesta Dawn, heavy-lidded, alluring, and gay.

It did not add to his ease of mind that he knew himself in the wrong. As Sam Levine had pointed out, he was not justified in playing with the money and reputations of others.

Should he plead that it was something more than mere breaking of training that had weighted his feet and fists and clogged his brain to-night? It was true that he had accepted Vesta Dawn's invitation to her birthday supper on the night before, but excess alone could not account for the slow response of his muscles and mind to the demands made thereon.

And yet to enter that plea was impossible. It savored of squealing, and he lacked the proof. That he has been doped is the excuse of a bad loser.

He was clearly in the wrong, and, being in the wrong, it was obviously impossible to admit it. Such is the logic of youth. He endeavored to imitate Sam Levine's coolness.

"So you think we had better separate?" he asked.

"I think we'd better stick together," was Levine's reply. "It's up to you."

"Up to me how?"

"Cut out the show-girl game and stick to training, and I will make you a champion. Or stick to the show-girl business and hunt up another manager. Which will you do?"

"I think we had better split," said the Navigator, feeling very proud of the indifferent air with which he surrounded the words. "Is there something coming to me?"

A shadow of disappointment crossed Levine's face. He offered no comment, however. In his philosophy every man played his own hand.

So he glanced at a slip of paper, counted out some bills from a fat roll, and took the young man's receipt. Everything was as formal and businesslike as paying a gas-bill. Nobody would have guessed that, quite apart from the profits he was losing, he was grieved by the turn of affairs.

Jack Garrett recounted the money—there was between five and six hundred dollars—and started away.

"Good-by, my boy — and good luck," said Levine.

An unexpected pang of regret on his own part that he was breaking with this square, clear-headed Jew seized Garrett. He stifled it with an effort, threw a casual response over his shoulder, and the door closed between them.

CHAPTER III.

A HUNT FOR SYMPATHY.

In telling Levine that he had an engagement with Vesta Dawn, Jack Gar-

rett had voiced desire rather than exact truth. He paused on the curb, questioning where he could find her.

The chances were that she would have left the theater, but it might be as well to look there first. He had money in his pocket, and, consequently, hailed a taxi and was driven to the Buckingham.

The playhouse was dark, front and rear. The next port of call was the apartment-house where she lived, in what has come to be known as the new Tenderloin.

On the way thither he had time to reflect. It was a pastime to which he was little given, but the stimulus was unusual.

His mind was a singular jumble of shame at his defeat, regret at the rupture with Sam Levine, and defiance of the world and its standards. Instinctive honesty compelled him to admit that he had not played fair with his manager.

He had run straight for several months before yielding to the temptations which always assail the successful prize-fighter. Then, at the psychological moment when he was ready for diversion, he had met Vesta Dawn —had met her, as he remembered vividly, through Butch Horlock just after he had signed for to-night's battle.

She was generally known as Butch's girl. This had only added zest to the gratification Jack Garrett experienced from her ready acceptance of his favors. It gave a tang to the relationship, making the men doubly rivals.

Jack had had no prevision at the earlier meetings of more than a passing acquaintance. He sensed very dimly even yet how really clever the girl was. Her coyness had only sharpened desire.

Well, he had been fool enough to pick up her challenge to attend the party the night before "because it was her birthday," and dearly had he paid. Now it was due him she should reward him with full meed of sympathy for his downfall.

And, anyway, there was the satisfaction of having taken Butch Horlock's girl from him—an empty, boyish satisfaction immensely savory to callow youth. The Butcher had not been invited to Vesta's party. She herself had told him so.

The taxi drew up in front of the apartment-house where Vesta lived. The hall-boy told Jack Miss Dawn had not come home. His disappointment showed in the caller's face.

"Ah'll tell her you was here, suh," said the lad. His interested air was worth a quarter to Jack. He paid it gratefully.

There was one chance left. She might have gone to the Grapery. This was an all-night restaurant close to the spirituous center of that bedlam known as the Great White Way. It was a favorite resort of Vesta's.

Thither he made his way. The Grapery was crowded, as was to have been expected at this hour. It breathed an atmosphere of artificial delight Vesta Dawn had taught Jack to enjoy.

From the platform at one end where an orchestra scraped tirelessly, a low dock ran out among the tables. This was the structure on which hired performers, mostly female, disported themselves in an intimate way, supposed by patrons of the Grapery to be extremely Parisian. As Jack entered a blond young person in draperies of black mosquito netting was doing fancy steps in and out among the late diners and assuring them that she was only a timid country maiden who had never been in a large city before, or words to that general effect.

Such of the patrons as paid any attention whatever to her remarkable statements seemed not in the least concerned about the girl's experiences. Most of those present, however—and the room was crowded to the very door —turned a deaf ear. Their attention was concentrated on their food, their drinks, and their private concerns.

Being in need of sympathy himself, Jack may have been in a mood to sym-

pathize with others. Whether or not such was the case, it occurred to him briefly to wonder why everybody looked so tired and bored—almost sad.

Some of the regulars he knew personally or by reputation, having become a regular himself, and his knowledge of their circumstances told him they should have been happier than they looked. Two tables away, for instance, was the son of a railroad king, a youth of Jack's own age.

He was smoking a cigarette and viewing the scene with a listless air and the manner of one who wishes himself anywhere else. On either side of him sat a pretty girl, and across the table a playwright who had the reputation of being the prince of companions. The magnate's son was worthily reputed to have the spending of one hundred thousand dollars a year without the necessity of accounting for a penny of it. And yet—

Jack pulled himself together and glanced sharply around. With cares of his own, it was unnecessary for him to worry about those of others, especially as the gilded youth in question was but a sample taken at random from a roomful like him.

Gaspard, the *maître d'hôtel,* who prided himself on never forgetting a face, approached.

"M. Garrett desires a table?" he inquired. "Just now it is impossible, but in a few minutes that party yonder will make the departure. They are from the country, seeing New York, and already their bill is larger than they had anticipated."

"Never mind, Gaspard," Jack replied. "I guess I won't stay."

"*Monsieur* perhaps is looking for a friend?"

"No. Well, have you seen Miss Dawn this evening?"

"Ah, the beautiful Miss Dawn? No, I have not seen her. But it is early yet. Perhaps later—"

"Maybe I'll look in later," Jack replied; "when there isn't such a crowd and so much smoke. Good night."

"*A la bonne heure, monsieur,*" said Gaspard gallantly, and the door-boys, in scarlet coats and breeches, white shirts and stockings, and ridiculous three-cornered hats, let him out.

What to do now? His sense of being a much abused young man grew with the difficulty of finding the fountain of sympathy he sought.

His need of consolation was becoming acute.

A late sporting extra was being cried to the crowds which, even at the midnight hour, passed up and down the street that never sleeps. Jack winced as he caught the words:

"All about Butch Horlock knocks out de Navigator!"

He felt himself becoming visibly smaller, and looked apprehensively into the faces of passers-by to determine whether they pitied his humiliation. It seemed very odd that nobody vouchsafed him more than a passing glance.

Walking slowly up the street, revolving courses of action, his heart gave a bound. A small, gray touring-car had passed, northward bound—evidently a hired machine. And in the rear seat was the lady he sought.

He acted on impulse without stopping to consider the propriety of the action. He was at Fortieth Street when the whistle of the traffic policeman sounded at Forty-Second, bringing Broadway travel to a quick halt. Jack bounded ahead and leaped to the running-board of the car.

"Vesta," he cried in the glad voice of an accepted lover, "I was looking for you. I went to the theater and to your house, and just now to—"

The look on the girl's face dammed his flow of words. Instead of the quick sympathy he had pictured to himself, he read there something so different that at first he could not believe it.

"Well, now you've found me, what do you want?" she asked.

"What's dis—a hold-up?" came from the other side of her.

Looking beyond the girl, and rapidly becoming frozen with surprise, Jack's eyes fell for the first time on her companion. He could have fallen from his perch with amazement at seeing Butch Horlock.

"What is it?" Vesta demanded again. "Quick—we're on our way to Rivington Inn."

"I—I just wanted to see you tonight, Vesta," Jack stammered. "What time will you be home?"

"Never—to you," said the girl with cutting emphasis.

"Aw, it's that hunk o' cheese, is it?" added Butch wearily. "Say, girlie, tell him to beat it before I get mad and poke him again."

"That's right," Vesta supplemented. "You beat it. And if you want something to chew on, just remember that nobody loves a loser."

Jack Garrett was very young and bumptious, or he had not put himself in the way of the added pain of this interview. His inexperience, also, may account for his effort to prolong an impossible situation.

"But, Vesta—" he began, with an idea of submitting the sad state of his suffering heart.

This he was not permitted to do. It had entered the Butcher's mind and Vesta's that the conversation had continued long enough. Simultaneously the traffic policeman's whistle sounded and the chauffeur threw in his clutch with a jerk.

"Say, you get t' hell out o' here—do you understand?" snarled the Butcher.

With the words he leaned forward across Vesta and planted a stiff blow in Jack Garrett's chest. At the same moment Vesta slapped him savagely on the cheek.

The combined jolt of the car's starting, the blow in the chest, and the girl's insult threw Jack from his perch on the running-board. For a fraction of a second he lay prostrate in the street, in imminent peril of hurrying wheels. When he had picked himself up the gray car had passed far beyond reach.

Blind with shame and rage, he made his way to the sidewalk and, with a dim idea of getting away from those who had witnessed his repulse, hurried west along Forty-Second Street. His brain rioted with savage impulses. He wanted to kill and rend and burn.

The smart of Vesta Dawn's soft hand branded his cheek. "Nobody loved a loser," she had said—the words were seared on his brain. Could anything soothe that smart?

As if sent in answer to the question, the bright lights of a corner saloon drew his gaze. Jack had never been much of a drinking man, but to-night his one fear was lest there had not been enough liquor distilled to bring forgetfulness. He found that there had been.

CHAPTER IV.

ADRIFT.

TWICE before in his life Jack Garrett had set out deliberately to break training. These occasions had been during his abbreviated college career.

How effectually he had dissipated the monotony incidental to a football season was written on the books of the university, which recorded that for certain phases of the second episode a student, whose name as written was John Garrett Follansby, had been requested to depart from the classic precincts of the institution of learning until the college could catch up with him.

With the return of aching consciousness to a naturally good set of brains, he acknowledged that in those adolescent days he had been the veriest tyro at breaking training. He could have blushed with mortification at the feebleness of previous efforts compared with the present had not his attention been occupied by pain which seemed to envelop him from his crown to the soles of his feet.

He opened his gluey lids and quickly closed them again. Even the dim light which reached to where he lay

sent a red-hot current of agony into his throbbing head. So for a moment longer he lay trying to remember what had happened.

A moving-picture film of barrooms and chance acquaintances was about all he could bring to mind. He recalled only too sharply his encounter with Vesta Dawn, the seizure of mad rage and mortification which had ensued. He could even summon up a mental picture of the saloon where he had started to drown consciousness.

Then there had been two men—what were their names? Oh, yes—Larry and Harry they had styled themselves, professing brotherly sympathy with his mood. Rough fellows they had been, but kind-hearted to a fault. They had stood by even to the length of defending him against the insinuating advances of others who, they had pointed out, entertained unworthy designs upon his negotiable property.

He was unable to tell whether his wanderings with Larry and Harry had been a matter of hours only, or of days. They had culminated in a quarrel, for which doubtless his own irresponsible self had been to blame. It had come about when Harry had suggested, even insisted, that he should be entrusted with guardianship of Jack's money.

He remembered putting up his fists to Harry. Then something had landed heavily on his head, and the moving-picture reel came to an abrupt end. He hoped he had not hurt his new friend.

More cautiously the second time he opened his eyes, the merest crack at first, until his optic nerves accommodated themselves to the light. An instant later his lids flew wide with astonishment.

The room, or wherever it was he lay, was unlike anything he had even seen before. Ceiling, sides, and bottom revealed a monotonous expanse of black, begrimed beams and rough boarding. It was without windows, but a gray, uncertain light sifted in from overhead at a point some distance away.

The next conscious sensation was of a tremendous pitching and rolling. As his senses slowly awakened he realized what it meant. He was at sea.

But how could this have happened? And what manner of craft was it in which he found himself afloat? Not a naval vessel, certainly. Even the coal-bunkers of a man-of-war would have been cleaner than this.

Lifting himself to a sitting posture with torturing effort, he found that he had lain wedged between two heavy stringers, which explained why the tossing of the vessel had been minimized for him hitherto. His eyes fell on his hands. They were blacker than any negro's, and he had a feeling his face was as well.

Could he have been shanghaied? It was a possibility, yet unlikely. Moreover, his acquaintance with the ways of the sea told him that had such an experience fallen to his lot he would now be on a bunk in the forecastle instead of in an empty and abandoned hold, as was evidently his plight. Also—his brain clearing by the minute—coal-carrying schooners did not shanghai their crews.

He struggled with a painful expenditure of energy to his feet, only to be thrown with a bump which jarred him from top to toe. The pitching of the vessel in which he was confined indicated tempestuous seas.

The jolt of the fall turned him a little faint. By way of gaining time, he went through his pockets and took inventory of his possessions. In his inner pocket, where he had placed it with a fatuous thought that it would lie close to his heart, was a note from Vesta Dawn received the day before his big fight.

Without rereading it, he tore the message into tiny bits, which when he had tossed them aside, lay like snowflakes on the black flooring. The very touch of the paper induced a nausea of self-contempt and black rage.

His cheek smarted again with the blow of her open palm. He saw himself sprawled in the middle of Broad-

way, while the girl and Butch Horlock sped away, mingling their laughter at his plight.

"Nobody loves a loser," she had told him. The worst of it, as even in his sick anger he had sense enough to admit, was that the statement was true. He little suspected, however, that there would come a time when he would feel like thanking her for reminding him of this great fundamental fact.

And Butch Horlock was with her! He tried vainly to dismiss the subject from his mind. His brain insisted on following the path down which the finger-board of their association pointed. It brought him plump against the inevitable, debasing conclusion.

Instead of having been Butch Horlock's successful rival for the favors of the showgirl, he had been fooled and betrayed. It was as clear as a freshly polished pane of glass.

The Butcher had introduced him to Vesta Dawn at about the time the articles were signed for their fight. She had given evidence of liking for him from the start. And he, like an inexperienced schoolboy, had fallen easy prey to her seductions.

Horlock had pretended jealousy with the end in view of stimulating Jack's infatuation. How they had played him, the two of them! And that birthday supper to which Jack had been invited and the Butcher had not—that gay party, where wine flowed free and Vesta challenged him to excesses, a supper on the eve of an important fight. It was a tremendous price he had paid for a night's folly.

And there had been something more. The heavy sleep, more like a stupor, which had ensued, the dulness of mind and body all the next day, the loginess of brain and members in the ring were not merely the after-results of overindulgence in wine.

After all that she had said to him, "Nobody loves a loser!" In an ecstasy of self-contempt Jack again staggered to his feet, supporting himself against the rocking wall of the compartment.

"Nobody loves a loser!" For the first time in his twenty-three years he took a stern resolution of success. He had been on the losing side from the start—a drifter—a waster. Drifting out of college in disgrace, drifting into the navy as an ordinary seaman because it was the first opening that presented, drifting into the ring at the beck of a better man than he, and breaking with him after abusing the generosity he had shown—it was a miserable record.

So there, in the grimy depths, Jack Garrett registered a solemn vow to turn his back thenceforth on failure. He had sat at that table long enough.

The hope that he had drunk his bitter cup to the dregs was dissipated when, running his hands swiftly through his other pockets, he found that, except for the note, he had been stripped bare. And that explained the fraternal companionship of Larry and Harry. He, John Garrett Follansby, born a gentleman, was everybody's easy prey, it seemed.

With a quick flash of determination he turned his back on the past to consider his present situation. Bones and muscles creaked and protested against movement, but his mind was reassuming the command. It pointed out that his first duty was to learn where he was.

He could not understand the absence of sailors. Even if he were in the hold of a ship, there should have been audible the rattling of upper works and the sounds of men. Instead of that he felt himself quite alone.

His progress toward the spot where a spot of light glowed against the blackness of walls and roof was slow and painful. Added to the fact that every bone and muscle groaned, the violent pitching of his prison threatened every second to throw him from his feet.

One roll sent him reeling. He stoutly arose and, inclined against the unstable

side-wall, gained foot after foot. At last he stood directly beneath what he discovered to be an open hatchway.

Some inkling of the situation dawned on him as he looked through the square ten feet above his head to a windy, gray sky. A new problem confronted him. There was neither companionway nor ladder by which he could mount to the open air. While he stood there staring, a deluge of green water poured in, leaving him drenched.

Without wings or a ladder he was helpless. He adopted the only possible course, resuming his exploration of the compartment for some means of egress. To remain where he was meant drowning like a rat in its hole, for the first inrush of water was being succeeded by others. The storm was rising.

A detailed account of his painful circuit of the vessel's hold would be superfluous. Enough that an hour later, having searched vainly every inch of the dusty pit, he arrived again at the hatchway without having discovered any possible way of climbing out.

He lifted his voice in a shout. It was incredible that he should be the only living creature on this monstrous hulk. But his tones came back so empty and forlorn that he refrained from trying again.

At one end of the craft, which he guessed to be the bow because the bolts sunk into the other suggested a rudder-post, he had found a boarded partition. He decided, after due reflection on the hopelessness of his case, to return thither and examine it more carefully.

He was rewarded by finding—with his fingertips, since the light failed—a loose board. He could only guess what might lie behind it. It was sufficient that it suggested a chance. Accordingly he worked at the crack until he was able to lay hold on the board and, by exerting his entire strength, wrench it loose.

Disappointment met him again, the opening giving only on a narrow between-partitions. He felt better for being occupied, however. Using the board he had removed for a lever, he managed to rip off another, and a third.

It dawned on him then that the wall of matched stuff beyond was merely thin casing. Such it proved. With heel and improvised battering-ram he forced it to give way and—it may have been three hours after he came to his senses—crawled through the opening into a small forecastle.

A minute later, ragged, black as a stove, and bleeding at the nails, he was on deck, and found the suspicion which had arisen while he stood staring up at the open hatchway confirmed.

He was on an empty coal-barge which, broken adrift from its tow, tossed like a chip on the angry rollers. The low, hurrying clouds overhead indicated that the gale would increase before it abated.

As far as his vision could reach in every direction were only empty water and empty sky. Well as he knew the ocean, he had never until that moment realized how insignificant a human being may feel alone upon its heaving surface.

There was no satisfaction in the knowledge, but the mystery of his plight was rapidly clearing. His chance friends, Larry and Harry, with their proffers of fraternal sympathy, were plain highwaymen of the common or New York variety. Having spotted his roll, they had set out to acquire it for themselves.

It had been necessary to resort to force in the end to accomplish this. Then, anxious to dispose of their victim, whom doubtless they thought they had killed, they had carried him to the river and thrown him aboard this hulk. For such consideration as their leniency indicated Jack mentally thanked them.

Afterward, as fate ordered, the

barge had been made the snapper of a tow and taken out to sea. It had broken away from the others in the rising tempest, and been left to its fate.

But such vessels usually carry a captain and a couple of hands. The answer to the question this truth provoked was found in the absence of the customary skiff. It revealed that the crew had abandoned ship, probably taking to the tug.

Having gone thus far in his reasoning processes, Jack Garrett found himself face to face with the probability that he approached the end of a fool's career. The sun was invisible, but the rapid diminution of light warned him that night was coming on, and with the rising of the gale it was highly unlikely that he would live to see another dawn.

He swore a mighty oath to cling to hope until the ultimate moment. His admirers had always admitted that he possessed unlimited pluck. Now if ever was the time to show it.

He clutched the low rail to save himself from being thrown, and as, riding a billow, he scanned the horizon vainly for aid, it occurred to him singular that so little water was breaking over the barge. He discovered the explanation in her lightness. She was like an empty coffin, both in shape and qualities, rising to every lift of the sea, when a load would have carried her under long ere this.

The disadvantage of her buoyancy was her tremendous rolling. She pitched, tossed, and swung like a feather in a hurricane. At one moment her sole passenger thought she was going to capsize. She righted, and an instant later was carried to the summit of a mountain-high billow, down whose flank as it passed she slipped with the sickening velocity of a roller-coaster.

There was a humble superstructure forward, built directly over the makeshift forecastle into which Jack had forced his way from the great, empty hold. He recognized it as captain's quarters and galley. Holding tight to the rail to keep from being thrown or washed overboard, he made his way thither.

He forced the door, which was jammed, and, dripping, cold, and miserable, passed inside. It was a dirty, musty hovel, unfit for the accommodation of a dog. To the man's immense gratification, however, there was a bunk.

He was suffering from the reaction of his debauch, a blow on the head, and his efforts. For a minute after he had closed the door everything turned black before him. He clung to a stanchion until the faintness had passed, after which he threw himself on the bunk, drew a pair of moldy and indescribably dirty blankets over him, and closed his eyes, too ill to care whether he ever rose again.

It was light when he awakened, and the light was that of another day. Stiff and lame, yet in a measure refreshed, he stumbled to his feet.

His first thought was that the storm must have abated, for the barge rolled far less than on the night before. The sullen swash of water beneath his feet disillusioned him.

Summoning every energy, he forced the door and stepped on deck. Only a glance was necessary to show that the gale was even worse than when he had closed his eyes. The wind had risen to a fifty-mile gait; it tore at the barge like a flock of harpies, promising dismemberment. Rushing upon the mighty rollers to which it had given birth, it sliced their crests and distributed them in white foam.

The hulk met the assault of the water sullenly, at every dip shipping the sea in tons. The manner in which she had lost her buoyancy was quickly apparent. Little by little she had settled as the salt wash broke through the open hatchway, until now it had become only a question of time when she would dip for the last time.

The young man looked swiftly

around in the hope of succor. It was an empty thought. As on the previous afternoon, sea and sky were deserted. Even the gulls were missing from the void overhead. He stood alone in the presence of the most terrifying spectacle earth presents.

He turned his eyes nearer home. The end of something wedged between the deck-house and the rail caught his notice. It was the missing hatch-cover, the sight of which suggested a faint possibility of delaying the inevitable end.

Carrying into execution the plan which sprang into his mind was another thing, for the cover, in addition to being squeezed tight into the corner into which the gyrations of the vessel had thrown it, was bulky and heavy beyond the strength of any ordinary man.

It was not a moment for feeling discouraged, however. Deluged by the seas which now broke continually over the doomed barge, Jack managed after heart-breaking effort to dislodge the cover and start it toward the open hatchway. If he could set it in place, the craft might live some time yet, even with the weight of water in her hold.

He found presently that the seas breaking over the deck were in their way a blessing, for once free the heavy cover was lifted and carried this way and that on their shoulders. Even so, guiding it was a Titanic task. The castaway who had undertaken it was thrown hither and yon, now swinging to one side of the deck and now to the other, more than once in imminent peril of being crushed between the cover and the rail, and in no less danger of being carried bodily over the side.

Inch by inch, nevertheless, fighting as he had never fought before, he advanced it toward the open hatchway. He had almost reached it when the deck-wash caught the man and his burden, hurling them far into the stern. Again he worked back, and a second time was repulsed. But on this third attempt fortune favored.

A roller broke over the deck, lifting the combatants clear of the flooring. With set teeth and his last ounce of strength Jack braced himself against the rim of the hatchway and hung on! When the water had subsided he felt like raising a shout of triumph; the cover had slipped into place, and for the moment the barge was water-tight once again.

More dead than alive, he crawled back into the deck-house, and fell on the floor, where he lay for more than an hour, limp and trembling.

As soon as he felt himself a little better he pulled himself together to take an accounting of his circumstances. Rummaging revealed a stone jug half full of water which once had been fresh, and some sodden bread. These constituted the available supplies as far as he could determine. He ate the bread, drank improvidently from the jug, and faced the future with fresh courage.

His precaution against the immediate filling of the barge having been taken, there was nothing left but to await the turn of events. The morning had brought with it unseasonable cold, adding to his wretchedness.

He would have tried to start a fire in the tiny galley stove, but the only box of matches he could find was water-soaked like everything else. He contented himself perforce with gathering the dripping, dirty blankets around his shoulders, trusting to the steam his own body heat generated for warmth.

The day dragged itself by in an eternity of wretchedness. The vessel's old timbers creaked and groaned under the combined attack of wind and wave, the water in her hold swashed and rumbled savagely, and the tumbling ocean fought for its prey. Still the derelict held together.

Jack Garrett had eaten all the bread, disposed of the last drop of brackish water in the jug, and sat crouched in

the deck-house shaking from cold and exhaustion, when he was revived to fresh interest in his surroundings by a grating crash. It brought him out of his stupor standing.

The first shock was followed by another, and still another. He knew instantly what had happened. Three years at sea had taught him the symptoms of a vessel's grounding. As he rushed out of the door his only question was as to what kind of bottom she had brought up on.

Not that it made any great difference whether it was ledge or sand-bar. In either case it probably meant speedy breaking up, and the end of John Garrett Follansby, one-time gentleman. But curiosity often survives even the most desperate circumstances.

CHAPTER V.

JESSICA HOOPER.

At the first lull in the three-days' gale Jessica Hooper proclaimed her intention of setting out for home without farther delay. The protests of her friends were powerless to dissuade her.

"I told grandfather I'd be back on Tuesday," she declared, "and here it is Friday. What will he think?"

"You're simply crazy to think of sailing twelve miles in this sea, Jess," said Amy Harms, whose guest she had been since the preceding Saturday. She was a dainty, slow-moving blonde, in striking contrast to her "company," black-haired, dark-eyed, whose every motion suggested a life spent in the open.

"I'll show you," replied Jessica, rising. "My bag is packed and I'm off. Come down to the harbor with me."

Perceiving that her friend was bent on departure, Amy bundled up in sweater and raincoat, and the girls started for the water-front.

The abatement of the storm had lured all the regulars to the town wharf, and the opportunity of offering advice to the girl who proposed to sail her catboat alone across the twelve miles of water between New Galilee and Barratry Island was joyously accepted.

"There's a powerful sea outside, gal," warned Captain Eb Spencer, shaking his gray head dismally. "If you was my daughter you wouldn't be starting out no such weather as this, let me tell you."

"Where's the danger, Captain Eb?" the girl gave him back with a laugh. "A fair wind and just enough. Why, I don't believe there's more than fifteen miles an hour to it this minute."

"Mebbe not, mebbe not," said the old man. "But you'll hit rough water going across. Still, the Polly Ann—"

"You helped build her, Captain Eb."

"Yes, and she'll stand as much rough work as any of them. Your grandfather and your father and I drove every nail that's in her, so we ought to know."

A wrinkled old woman with a shawl over her head had drawn near and felt that it was time to add her comment, which took the shape of an epigram.

"Them as lives by the sea must be ready to die by the sea," she piped in a cracked voice.

Jessica turned to her with the laughter still in her eyes.

"It's as good a way as any to die when you get ready to die," she remarked. "I'm not ready yet, but you can think of me to-night sleeping in my own little bed on Barratry, Aunt Abbie."

"I ain't seen you to ask how grandpa's getting along with them Simcoxes and Whittleses," put in Captain Eb. "Had any trouble yet?"

"Not much, Captain Eb," the girl returned, a shadow of trouble crossing her face. "At least—well, not any to speak of."

"Tell him from me to keep his eye

peeled," the aged salt warned. "He's all grit to set his traps off the island, and I'm afeard—I'm afeard."

He was prevented from elaborating on his apprehensions by a summons from a stalwart, brown-skinned youth who had brought the Polly Ann from her mooring to the side of the dock, where he held the catboat steady.

"Better let me go with you, Jess," he suggested in low tones. "The wind's fair and I guess the gale's blown out, but there'll be a powerful sea running. Don't seem right your starting out this way."

"Oh, I'll be all right, Aleck," the girl returned confidently. "You know that I've had some experience in sailing a cat."

"None better in these parts," Aleck admitted. "Still, a woman—"

"Good-by, Amy," Jessica interrupted, throwing her arms around her friend. "Had a lovely time. Come over as soon as you can. Good-by, everybody."

"Keep your peak down and your mainsheet free," Captain Eb bellowed after her as she dropped down the harbor. Aleck and the rest chipped in with miscellaneous advice, most of which was lost by the boat's gathering impetus.

"A reg'lar duck," was Captain Eb's comment as he resumed his seat on the upturned skiff at the head of the dock. "There ain't another woman anywheres I'd have let start out for Bar'try this afternoon. But Jess'll get there."

That was Jessica's own idea, although as she steered skilfully past the end of the bar at the harbor's mouth and caught the surge outside she realized that she had underestimated its dimensions. But the Polly Ann settled reassuringly to her task, and the girl in the stern of the boat, intent on tiller and sheet, had no time to nurse fears.

It was a fair way from New Galilee to Barratry, twelve miles out to sea. An hour and a half—two hours at the outside—should see her safe at home again. That was, if the gale really had blown out, if the wind continued fair, and accidents of the sea were avoided.

As she had reminded Amy, her intention had been to return to her grandfather on Tuesday. She had awakened that morning to find warring elements in possession of the world. She promised herself to start on Wednesday, and on Thursday, but the storm still held.

Mid-afternoon of Friday had brought with it a subsidence of storm so sudden as to be almost startling. Jessica cocked an eye at the sky. The signs there spoke of an exhausted gale, but hinted at fog.

She did not care about that, for at her feet was her compass-box, and she knew every current between Barratry and New Galilee almost as well as she knew the fingers on her hand. She would not go so far as to say she could steer the Polly Ann into the old harbor with her eyes shut, but she would aver that with the aid of a compass she could reach port without having departed a half-mile from the straight course.

Jessica Hooper could not remember the time when she had not known how to sail a boat. Her chubby fingers had clasped the tiller in infancy, and she had grown to the art as naturally as the average child takes to walking.

It had come in especially handy this year, with her grandfather fishing off Barratry. But for her mastery of the Polly Ann, her visits to her old home at New Galilee would have been even rarer than they were.

Troubled by the thought of how long she had overstayed her promised time, she nursed the wind, pushing the catboat for all the speed that was in her. She had covered a little more than half of the reach between the mainland and the island when the fog shut down.

It was as if the Polly Ann had sailed into the confines of a dense

cloud. In an instant even the sullen rollers a dozen feet away were snuffed out, and the little catboat constituted a tiny universe of its own—a universe without other living creatures than the rosy-cheeked, black-haired girl in its stern.

Contrary to habit, Jessica permitted herself an exclamation of annoyance. While feeling perfect confidence in her power to reach port through this gray, moist blanket, she might be delayed. She was impatient to rejoin her grandfather.

A moment later she consoled herself with another reflection, made aloud.

"Anyway, it can't last long," she said. "It came up against the wind, and it'll be torn to pieces behind."

The thought restored her cheerfulness. After all, it was rather fun to be shut off from everything and everybody—to be thrown on her own resources, while the surge leaped and snarled to broach her little craft. Quite without willing she broke into song:

"To sea! To sea! The calm is o'er;
The wanton water leaps in sport,
And rattles down the pebbly shore;
The dolphin wheels, the sea-cows snort,
And unseen mermaids' pearly song
Comes bubbling up, the weeds among.
Fling broad the sail, dip deep the oar;
To sea! To sea! The calm is o'er."

Her voice, clear, sweet, uncribbed by training, carried over the heaving face of the ocean. As it died away the girl fancied she caught the echo of a distant shout. She bent her ear to listen.

The only sounds which greeted her were the plash of the rollers against Polly Ann's quarter and the purr at the stern made by the boat's progress. She ridiculed herself with a quiet, throaty laugh. Of course it had been only a figment of her fancy.

Barratry must still lie four or five miles away, and there was no land between. She had satisfied herself before the fog closed in that the reach across was free of shipping. She sang the second verse of her song:

"To sea! To sea! Our wide-winged bark
Shall billowy cleave its sunny way,
And with its shadow, fleet and dark,
Break the caved Tritons' azure day,
Like mighty eagle soaring light
O'er antelopes on Alpine height.
The anchor heaves, the ship swings free,
The sails swell full. To sea! To sea!"

Jessica clipped the last notes short, as if to surprise the dream-call heard before. But this time her imagination lay sleeping, for no hail reached her. She glanced at the compass between her feet, let the main-sheet out a notch, and had her notice caught suddenly by some dark object riding on the crest of a roller.

It gave her a little start to find her exclusive universe invaded by something which was neither sea nor fog, but as the object, whatever it was, had sunk down the flank of the wave and did not reappear until she had swept by and out of sight it was impossible to gratify curiosity.

Perhaps a minute later her eyes were attracted again. This time she made out the nature of the intrusion. It was a bit of wreckage, and in an instant she was in a current of the stuff.

A daughter of the ocean, she recognized its significance at once. Some vessel had met disaster, and that at no remote spot. But how or where she was unable to imagine, for in the direction whither the trail of wreckage pointed there was no land on which a ship could have been cast—none, that is, for many miles. Yet the way in which the jumbled planks and timbers held together was eloquent of disaster near at hand. Else it had been scattered long since.

Her present duty was to keep clear of the wreckage. Part of the stuff was heavy timbers which, cast javelin-like, would have shattered the Polly

Ann like an eggshell. It was significant that as Jessica pulled the tiller toward her and let out the sheet, running before the wind, the color in her cheeks retained all its brilliancy and her pulse remained steady as clockwork.

In a moment she was clear of the driftage, and set her brain to considering whether she ought to investigate or continue on her homeward course. She could not imagine what had happened. Two possibilities suggested themselves.

The first, that there had been a fire at sea, she dismissed, for the stuff she had seen bore no traces of flame's corrosion. The remaining theory was that some ancient hulk had been the victim of a collision. It seemed impossible that disintegration would have followed such a mishap, but she had seen craft continued in the coastwise trade long after their years of usefulness, which looked as if they would crumble into fragments at a touch.

If such a thing had happened it was her duty to turn to the assistance of possible survivors. Without waiting to weigh arguments, she came about and headed toward the source of the wreckage as far as she could determine it.

Presently she touched the outer edge of the driftwood stream again. It presented a curious spectacle. There were pieces of wood of all sizes, from kindling to a great beam with the planking still attached, the entire mass as big as the side of a house.

All her skill was required to follow up this current and at the same time avoid entanglement. After tacking back and forth several times, she saw a sight which made her heart beat faster.

It looked at first like a snarl of dunnage nailed to some boards. The fog, true to her prophecy, had already thinned a little, however, and Jessica made out the head and shoulders of a man.

At the same moment she became aware of a big hulk which might have been a rudder-post plowing toward the Polly Ann. For an instant the fate of the catboat and its mistress hung in the balance. With a motion lightning quick, yet unhurried, Jessica pulled in her sheet, swung the tiller, and the threatening monster was hurled past, barely grazing the Polly Ann.

This was clearly a dangerous position for her to hold. The attack she had just escaped might be repeated at any minute. Yet there was a man in midstream of the débris—a human being in distress, if still alive, whose plight commanded assistance. Jessica brought her strong, white teeth together in a way which would have reminded those who knew him of her grandfather Hooper, and drove straight for the restless, hurrying driftage.

The plan sprang full-fledged into her mind. She would work into the center of the mass and, if the Polly Ann remained unharmed so long, float down the wind in the same direction as the dangerous timbers were moving. There was less risk in striking them head-on than in being smashed on the quarter.

Alert in every nerve and muscle, she worked her way farther and farther toward the center. Now with a quick shift of the tiller she quartered the flow, and again pushed ahead at right angles. All of the time, unable to watch it, she kept in mind as well as she could the position of the mass on which she had caught sight of the man.

Judging herself at length to have gone as far as the occasion demanded, she let her sheet run and headed down the wind. She was glad now of the dropped peak, which lessened the speed of the catboat. The wind, too, had fallen a little.

The keenest attention to business was still necessary, and more than once she avoided running the nose of the Polly Ann plump into something more

substantial than itself by a hair's-breadth. As one minute succeeded another a graver fear than of shipwreck claimed possession. She had thought to pick up the mass she was in search of readily, and she began to fear she had lost it.

She had as guide only its relative position to the outer sentinels of the drift drive. Could it have been carried to one side or the other by a cross-current? Had she passed close without visioning it in the fog? Or—more terrible thought—had the man slipped from his support and sunk into the green, weed-carpeted depths?

With brain and muscle engrossed in the task to which she had given herself, she had forgotten to raise a hail. Now she did so, sending a clear "Hello" across the waters. The chances were the man was unconscious, if not dead, but—

Close at hand the response seemed. Her calculations had been correct; she had not oversailed him, as she had begun to fear. She swung the Polly Ann a little closer to the edge of the drift and called:

"Hold on. I'll take you off."

The voice that answered "All right" was a feeble one, but courageous. Whoever the derelict might be, it was apparent he had not yielded himself to despair. Something about the quality of it—or perhaps it was the enunciation of the words—stirred in Jessica a suspicion that he was other than a mere sailor.

She was too busy, however, for cogitation. The man had supplemented his "All right" with an admonition to hurry up, which was precisely what she proposed doing. Again and again she shouted, and was guided by his answers, and at last came in view of her quarry.

He lay outstretched in the center of a jumble of débris perhaps fifteen feet across. It suggested a log-drive, now opening, now closing together, and it seemed miraculous that the castaway had held his place so long. Taking him off promised even greater difficulties than finding him, for the boisterousness of the sea had abated imperceptibly, if at all.

The surge still curled to the height of the Polly Ann's masthead. The wreckage was hurled hither and yon as if shot from a cannon. To remain stationary meant disaster for the catboat.

"Can you come over to this side?" cried Jessica.

"I can't move," was the man's disheartening reply. "My arm's wedged and I think it's broken. Never mind me—you'll get into trouble yourself."

"Of course I'll mind you—that's what I'm here for," the girl returned indignantly. "I'll take you off—never fear."

The castaway refrained from replying, as if harboring his strength. Jessica's quick brain studied the situation.

Since the man could not move unaided, she must reach him and release his arm. That much was plain. And it was humanly possible to crawl over the loose raft of driftwood to his side, although the chances were a thousand to one against success.

But what of the Polly Ann meanwhile? Suddenly the solution of that problem broke clear. If the catboat were nursed to a cradle on the leeward side of the raft and brought up into the wind, it would at any rate be sheltered from following timbers while she tried what she could do toward setting the castaway free from his trap.

Only a highly skilled expert in the management of small sailing boats could have carried such a scheme into practise single-handed. The man, trapped like a rat in the timbers, watched her listlessly. Even his nearly exhausted body was thrilled by the daring of the girl as she eased her eggshell craft and laid it snug alongside the groaning rack of woodstuff without so much as starting her paint.

This, however, was the easiest part

of the undertaking. It brought Jessica to the point where skill became valueless and must give place to reckless dash.

The instant the bow of the Polly Ann, luffed into the wind, touched the raft she had sprung from its dry safety to the unstable footing beyond. The Polly Ann's long painter was in her hand, that the catboat might not drift away.

Seemingly blind to the hazards of the situation, yet stepping as lightly and certainly as a mountain-goat, she picked her way toward the derelict. She grasped his plight without wasting breath on words. Every second was fraught with peril of death.

His arm, as he had told her, was wedged in a V of fractured lumber. They joined strength in tearing it loose. It might be broken, as he had said, but the time was too short to think of that. The doctor could look to it later.

"Get up!" she ordered when he was free.

He had pluck, had this curly-headed, handsome young man—handsome despite the pallor which the unshaven cheeks accentuated—for he tried to obey. But the effort undid him, for he sank back, fainting.

Jessica saw that she had a larger task cut out for her than she had figured on. She accepted the odds without a moment's hesitation. Her left hand still held the Polly Ann's painter. Her right fingers she wound into the derelict's coat collar.

Thus she dragged him toward her boat, as unceremoniously as she would have dragged a bag of meal. But how she managed to get him over the catboat's rail she could never afterward explain.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FAULTY COMPASS.

THE rapidity with which the old barge broke up after grounding fairly amazed Jack Garrett. He had recognized her for an ancient hull during his search for an exit from her hold. Not until now, however, had it become apparent that she was pinned together only with rusted spikes and oakum calking.

She seemed fairly to crumble under his feet as he stood clinging to the deck-house door to keep from being blown oversides. It was evident that a half-hour at the utmost would read her doom.

And yet to Jack's benumbed mind there appeared nothing to be done. He could only renew his determination to fight to the last, accepting the end with unfurrowed brow as became a gentleman and a prize-fighter.

The barge groaned and shrieked for mercy in the clutch of wind and wave. The elements lifted the great bulk and cast it down with the ease and unconcern of a child playing with its rattle.

The bottom was first to go. Jack could tell when it had been ground out by the rush of air which lifted the hatches. The vessel lost a little in buoyancy after that. Nevertheless, her gratings were terrifying.

She disintegrated rapidly following this first tremendous breach. Her side planking was torn away, the deck-house, shaken loose, carried over the rail, and the lone passenger found himself driven from spot to spot in brave determination to cling until the last second.

Then, when her rails were level with the water, there rushed over her a tremendous roller, which lifted and threw him wide. He was surprised at coming to the surface a moment later to find himself still alive. He was sorry, too; it would have been so much easier to die than to carry on the struggle. Yet honor insisted on the latter.

The same lulling of the gale which had lured Jessica Hooper to adventure the passage to Barratry had made itself apparent while the barge was be-

ing beaten to fragments, but the fog held aloof. It was by virtue of this clemency that Jack Garrett caught sight of a bunch of timbers near by, to which he made his way and, pulling himself out of the water with a final, supreme effort, cast himself, fainting, face downward on their frail floor.

How long he remained unconscious he could not tell. He regained his senses to find himself held immovable, his arm having dropped into a crevice, which clutched it as in a vise. Moreover, it was wrenched by the contortions of his raft until he thought it would be torn from its socket.

The pain brought on another fainting spell. In a more virile state Jack would have been heartily ashamed of himself for this womanly weakness, for he had never fainted in his life before. When he came to himself the second time the fog had closed in, and he thought he heard a woman's voice singing.

Although every circumstance pointed to delirium, he raised his own in a faint shout. The effort, while it left him spent, helped to clear his brain. He noticed that his raft had grown by accretions of other flotsam. Vaguely he wondered whether in the end he should die of hunger or thirst or exposure. Probably the three would so cooperate that the most skilful diagnosis would fail to determine the point.

His rescue by Jessica Hooper has been described. He had sought to protest against the risk of her life to save his useless one, but pure exhaustion had prevented. When, having been transferred to the catboat, he opened his eyes it was to be greeted with the straightforward remark:

"Well, I'm glad you've come to. I don't know where I am."

Jack tried to frame his lips to an acknowledgment of his own ignorance. The girl, tucking her tiller under her arm, drew the cork from a stone jug and held it to his lips.

The long draft of water stimulated like wine. The result was what the girl had hoped for. There was pressing need of conversation with this nearly dead stranger she had snatched from the sea.

"What boat was wrecked?" she asked tersely, perceiving that Jack felt better.

"A barge — derelict," he replied with equal economy of words.

"Collision?"

"Grounded."

At that the girl opened her dark eyes wide.

"Grounded!" she repeated. "How could that be? There's no land off here."

"Submerged ledge," Jack explained. "Tore her all to pieces."

The girl pondered over this with knit brows. She had come plump against a poser. After a suspicious look at Jack, as if she questioned his credibility, she bestowed one even more suspicious on the compass at her feet.

"I don't understand it at all," she mused. "The only ledge around is Garr's Ledge, and that's two miles out of my course. Could there be— But, of course, there's nothing uncharted in these waters."

She was thinking the situation over aloud. Jack saw no occasion to interrupt.

"If it's Garr's Ledge," she went on, "my compass must be wrong. In that case I'd have gone straight out to sea if I hadn't found you. That means that you saved my life."

This view of the affair was so novel that Jack felt staggered. The girl continued her monologue without paying him any attention.

"I've got to find out for certain whether or not that is Garr's Ledge," she said. "There's no way of telling how far off the compass is. But if it's Garr's I'll find Asa Hewlett's lobster-pot buoys." She addressed herself to Jack again. "How many were on the barge?" she demanded.

"I was the only one."

"That's good. We won't have to spend time hunting for any one. I don't know what grandfather will think of my being so long away."

The wonder with which the man viewed the manner of this black-haired, red-cheeked girl operated in a degree to revivify his mind by drawing it from his own distempers. She was of a type quite new to him.

As fate had ordered it, his experience of women had been largely among those of whom Vesta Dawn may stand as a fair example. He had devoted his time in college to athletics and the intervals between training periods, both earnestly cultivated for all they signify. In the navy his lack of rank had debarred him from female society of his hereditary class, and the others had not appealed.

In Jessica Hooper he saw the modest self-possession of a girl set side by side with the strength, courage, and competence of a spirited boy, and marveled at the combination. What had this creature in common with languorous, laughing, full-lipped Vesta?

Jessica had been studying him in turn. She had brought the Polly Ann about again, dipping to escape the swinging boom. As the catboat squared away into the wind she said:

"I'm sorry about your arm, but you see I can't do anything in this sea. It will have to keep till we can get where there's help."

"I don't believe it's broken," Jack replied. "Anyway, it doesn't matter. I can—"

He stopped and bit his lip until the blood ran as the boat heeled to a flawy gust and a thrill of excruciating pain shot through his shoulder. The girl was keenly observant of his anguished expression.

"Can you shift over closer?" she asked. "There, that's right. Snuggle in between me and the thwart."

She ran inquisitive fingers along his arm, testing the bone, yet so delicately as to cause him a minimum of discomfort.

"It's all sound," she announced. "It's a miracle, too. I don't see how it could help being ground to flinders. If I could only manage a sling, for it's plain you twisted it badly. Here's what we will do if you can stand it—let me lift the arm and put it across my knees so. Then it won't get knocked about."

The black curtain gathering before Jack Garrett's face led him to fear he was going to disgrace himself by fainting again. He fought it back with more spirit than he had ever carried into the ring. The girl noted the droop of the head and the ebb of blood which left his face paper-white. She thought she understood.

She took a half hitch in the main sheet around a thole-pin, tucking the loose end under so that it could be cast free with the slightest pull, and with the hand thus liberated felt under the thwart for her bag. She took from it some sea biscuit.

"Eat these," she ordered. "Grandfather taught me never to get into a boat without some water and a bite to eat. Finding you like this shows he was right. I believe you're half-starved."

"More than half," Jack replied faintly, with a feeble effort at a joke. "Could I have another drink?"

"Something better for you than water," the girl said. "I'm carrying grandfather a bottle of home-made wine."

She pulled the cork with her teeth and he drank. An expert would have been puzzled to name the wine, but it was pure grape-juice and sugar, and it operated like an infusion of life blood. She watched its results narrowly.

"You're better now," she said after he had consumed a half dozen biscuit. "If you've been starving long you'd better not eat any more just yet. Or was there plenty aboard the barge?"

"A little bread and a little water," he returned. "They were all gone yesterday — the day before — I don't know when."

"Goodness gracious!" the girl exclaimed. "No wonder you fainted away when I dragged you to the boat. You don't look like a sailor."

"I was one," he said simply.

"I mean a barge sailor. There are all sorts of sailors and then there are barge hands. But that will keep. What we've got to do now is find out whether my compass was wrong, and the only way I know of is to pick up Asa Hewlett's lobster pot buoys. This fog hangs on like a sprained thumb, as Captain Eb says."

Jack was indifferent to Captain Eb's wisdom. He did want to know, however, what Asa Hewlett's lobster pot buoys might have to do with getting to port. An exclamation from the girl intercepted inquiry.

"The wind's dropped a little," she said. "I wonder whether—"

"What is it?" he inquired as she stopped short.

"I was wondering," she went on doubtfully, "whether you could swing around so as to keep a hand on this tiller while I went forward and raised the peak. We need all the speed we can get now. At the same time, I don't want you to almost kill yourself."

A moment later she told him admiringly:

"Well, you've got pluck. Just hold her on the wind. I won't be half a minute."

He watched her as she picked her way forward and flattened out the sail. Her strong, tanned hands, muscular as those of a boy, yet not coarsened by outdoor work, first caught his notice. His eyes passed down the curves of her youthful figure, full of grace. There was nothing languorous there. Yet undeniably there was appeal. It was made to a set of emotions quite different, however, from those such girls as Vesta Dawn touched.

The firm, rounded bust and the free use of the waist muscles as she tugged on the peak halyard declared her uncorseted. She wore rubber-soled canvas shoes, and seemed unconscious that her feet were soaked. Nor could the cheap black stockings disguise the symmetry of small, rounded ankles.

She had just made the rope fast to a cleat forward and started to return when she stopped, her eyes fixed on some object.

"What is it?" Jack called.

"I thought I saw—yes, there it is again," she cried. "One of Asa's buoys."

She jumped back to the stern and took the tiller from his hand.

"Duck," she warned as the Polly Ann came about. The boom swung over with a rattle of hoops, and she started for the buoy.

It was easier to search than to find. The painted stick, showing for a second, remained thereafter persistently hidden by fog and cresting wave. Jack Garrett found opportunity to put his question.

"How is a lobster pot buoy going to help you pick up your course?"

"One wouldn't," she admitted. "But a line of buoys would. Asa Hewlett has a line of forty or fifty set off Garr's Ledge, and I happen to have heard that they ran southeast and northwest. So don't you see that if I locate them and the ledge too I know where I am and can figure how far off my compass is?"

It was perfectly clear as she explained it. At the same time it was so different from any sea knowledge Jack had picked up during his service in the navy that it opened his eyes to a new way of living. He followed up his first question with another.

"Suppose it should be somebody else's buoys and not Asa Hewlett's?" he said. "I mean, how can you tell whose they are?"

"It's plain you've never shore-fished much," the girl laughed. "Every lobsterman has his own colors for his buoys, registered like cattle brands in the West. Asa's are white with black ends. There it is again," she cried, half rising.

Jack saw it this time. The buoy which meant so much was a mere painted stick three inches in diameter and a foot and a half long. Jessica guided the boat alongside, so he could see the initials "A. H." burned in the wood.

"Now I've got to run the line until I find out which way they point, so don't talk," she ordered. "Grandfather will think I'm never coming back to Barratry."

Although wondering what the name meant, Jack fell silent as ordered. After a couple of false moves the second buoy was picked up, and then, with the aid of the perfidious compass, a third and fourth. Jessica performed some mental calculations.

"I have it!" she cried. "The ledge is astern. We're heading northwest. There's north — east — south—west," pointing. "But how could the compass be so wrong? Could it have been —but they wouldn't dare."

Two troubled lines appeared between her brows. Jack wanted to ask the suspicion which lay behind them. He refrained, reflecting that it was none of his business. She would tell him if she thought best.

She picked out her course, adjusting it to the vagaries of the compass, and they started away. The survivor of the shipwreck had already been restored to his seat of comfort, wedged between her knees and the side of the Polly Ann.

Drained by his hardships, drowsiness laid hold on him. His lids grew heavier and heavier, his head an insupportable weight. He was barely conscious at the end that a hand laid gently on his curly hair guided him to a comfortable pillow, and he fell asleep.

From time to time Jessica stole a look at the head of this strange youth she had rescued, cushioned on her knees. A slight flush was superfluously added to the rose bloom of her cheeks. After each furtive glance she turned away quickly to study her canvas, the quartering wind and the dying sea.

Try as she might, however, she was unable to repress altogether her curiosity about this castaway. The conviction grew that she had been right in denying his title to be a barge hand. For the matter of that he looked little enough like a sailor.

His features, despite the lines of exhaustion and suffering, spoke a higher calling than that. Even his clothing, stained and worn as it was, proclaimed an expensive tailor and disregard of cost.

Then her thought came back to the lying compass. Its shortcoming had made the stranger's rescue possible. Otherwise, with the direction of the drift, he would have been swept past Barratry Island and lost beyond hope.

For that reason she was glad her compass had gone wrong. For quite another it rendered her strangely anxious. She wanted to reach her grandfather's side as quickly as she could. Under the impulse of this desire her lithe muscles strained as if thus she could push the Polly Ann to greater speed.

An hour after he had fallen asleep Jack was awakened with a gentle shake. He recovered himself slowly, but after the first shock came to himself with a start. His own face crimsoned in turn as he realized how he had won his rest.

"We're at Barratry," the girl broke in on his stammering apologies. "And the fog's gone."

The young man sat up and looked around. It was as she said—the fog had lifted, the wind had died to just enough to give the Polly Ann headway, and they had passed into the lee of a point where the waters were scarcely ruffled by the backwash from outside.

Blue sky had supplanted lowering clouds. The sun was sinking behind the land in a glory of red and gold. Near at hand a group of low, unpainted buildings crowded to the water's

edge, and a half dozen flimsy docks reached out like grasping fingers.

A stocky man in yellow oilskins and a sou'wester stood at the end of one of these docks. Jack noted as the salient feature of his face, which was really all that his costume revealed, a grizzled beard seeming to sprout mostly from under his chin. The old man raised a shout.

"For the land's sake, Jess, is that you?" he called. "I thought even a mack'rel gull'd know enough not to try coming across to-day."

"Hello, grandfather," the girl called back. "I've brought company."

"Sufferin' porpoises, so you have," the other returned as she made a skilful turn to the dock. He fished up her painter with a boat-hook. "Well, he's welcome, whoever he is, and I swan I'm glad to see you again, girl."

A quarter of a minute later he had his arms around her, boathook in one hand and warp in the other.

CHAPTER VII.

BARRATRY ISLAND.

To his great mortification, the young man was compelled to play the rôle of an invalid. So weak was he, in fact, that he was unable to make the high step from the Polly Ann's bow to the dock unaided. He would have fallen after being lifted to the narrow planking but for the support of his rescuer's grandfather.

Jessica's orders were that he be put to bed at once.

"I'm all right—just give me a bite to eat and let me sit down," he protested. Captain Zed, as he learned was the general way of addressing the gray-whiskered person who had welcomed Jessica at the dock, overruled his demurrer.

"No, you ain't, neither," he contradicted. "I've seen many a shipwrecked man, but I dunno's I ever see ary one that needed nursing more than you do. Anyway, my granddaughter is skipper of this here craft, and if she says you've got to go to bed and be sick, to bed you go."

His sodden clothes removed, his battered body clothed in one of the captain's coarse cotton night-shirts and laid between clean, dry sheets, and Jack was forced to admit that his symptoms had been accurately diagnosed. It was wonderfully agreeable to play the tired, sick child again after what he had passed through.

For a few minutes—a very few indeed—after he had been permitted a bowl of warm, vivifying broth and a cup of coffee, he lay awake taking mental inventory of his state. His badly wrenched arm had been rubbed with carron oil, the coast dweller's specific for everything from frost-bite to sprains and burns, and bandaged with clean linen. It throbbed dully from shoulder to finger-tips, echoing the grinding it had undergone between hungry fragments of wreckage.

For the matter of that, his whole body felt like a mass of bruises. Captain Zed, looking him over, had discovered a great bump on his head, underlying a bad scalp wound. This had been fixed up with ointment and plaster.

Jack allowed him to nurse the belief that it was inflicted by a wave-tossed timber, although he himself knew it for a memento of his costly acquaintance with his casual barroom acquaintances.

Then he fell into the deep sleep of exhaustion. When he awoke from one of those troubled dreams of insuperable difficulties which often act as *avant courriers* of returning consciousness, he could not remember at first where he was.

He found himself in bed in a low, rude, poorly appointed but scrupulously neat room. It was furnished with a small rug of woven rags, a soft-pine dresser painted yellow, with brown striping, a couple of chairs, and on the wall some pictures cut from magazines tacked to the unpapered

boards. Brilliant sunshine flooded it from a window near the head of the bed.

While he lay with half-opened eyes, drowsily curious about his surroundings, a door swung to an exact three inches, and Jessica Hooper peeped through the crack. She remained thus, inspecting the figure on the bed, until Jack said: "Come in."

Responsive to the invitation, she stepped to the bedside and looked him over. He awaited her verdict.

"You're better," it came presently. "I will have your breakfast right away. You are to stay in bed to-day. Yes, you must. How is your arm?"

"It aches a little still," he admitted.

"Of course it does. Grandfather will rub it again. It's a wonder the bones weren't crushed."

"But there's no reason why I should quarter myself on you like this," he said. "Isn't there a hospital, or anyway a hotel or—"

"No, there isn't," she broke in. "And if there was, what of it? After you are able to get around you can do as you please, but we are going to make you well first. Now don't talk any more until I say you may. First you must have your face and hands washed."

He was minded to object to that, but found his opposition vain. She performed her task with the impersonal thoroughness of a trained nurse, and Jack was compelled to confess to himself that the result was refreshing.

He could not summon to his part of patient quite the same indifference to the operation with which she evidently viewed it, however, try as he might. After she had finished and gone to prepare his breakfast he still felt the touch of her strong, brown little hands, and felt stronger himself for the nearness of her abundant health.

On the second morning thereafter he rebelled effectively against long continuance in bed. The simple, carefully chosen diet she selected, combined with the rest, had fought back the poisons of exposure and fatigue. She admitted grudgingly that he might be well enough to get out of bed, and brought his clothes, cleaned and pressed but showing the stains of ill usage.

While his strength was less than he had expected to find it, the process of dressing and making his way to the combination kitchen, dining, and living room from which his bedroom and two others opened, leaving him quite spent, he underwent rapid restoration from then on. The enforced leisure provided him with opportunity to grasp his surroundings.

Barratry Island he knew of as a seaman knows landfalls in his cruising ground. It was a rugged uplifting of cliffs and sand beaches about one hundred and fifty miles from New York as the crow flies. The fact that it was easily accessible by train and boat had developed it into a popular summer resort—a wilderness of hotels and boarding-houses clustered around a bathing beach.

Aside from the three summer months, and along its irregular coastline apart from the much frequented beach, life on Barratry was much the same as it had been for nearly three hundred years. There are many Barratry Islands along the Atlantic, where, out of touch with modern influences, men and women develop feudal individualities, in the course of generations erecting their own system of laws and coming to believe themselves superior to the political bodies from which a few miles of water separate them.

The very name of this bit of land on which fate had thrown Jack Garrett was significant of the character of its inhabitants. If in the present day they refrained from flashing false lights on their headlands to lure passing vessels to destruction, the same spirit of lawlessness was alive, manifesting itself in other ways.

"In the summer," Jessica explained, "the natives prey on summer boarders; in winter they prey on one

another. And they fish all the year around."

"Your description is uncomplimentary to yourself and your grandfather," Jack reminded her.

"Oh, we are not natives," the girl replied. "We're only here for the fishing season. If we're not sorry we came for that long before we get through I shall be glad."

"Why, isn't the fishing good?" the young man asked.

If anybody had told him two weeks earlier that he would feel pleasure in sitting in the kitchen of a fisherman's shanty talking with a fisherman's granddaughter, he would have scoffed at the idea. The statement would have caught him on the flood of his affair with Vesta Dawn, when life as mirrored in New York's Tenderloin had represented the summit of ambition here below.

Yet here he was, absolutely satisfied with his surroundings. He made himself useful as well as ornamental by shelling some peas for Jessica.

"The fishing? Oh, yes, that's all right," she answered. "It's always good off Barratry. You see, the tide comes out of the bay above here and strikes the northward current. That causes a back eddy that seems to swing the fish around this shore. Although," she added, "it hasn't been so very good so far this season."

"What makes you think you'll be sorry, then?" he persisted.

She side-tracked the subject with a personal criticism.

"You don't act as if you'd had much practise shelling peas," said she. "If we're going to have them for dinner, I see I'll have to lend a hand."

Suiting action to the words, she drew a chair up to his and with her deft fingers made short work of the task she had set him.

"You may be a sailor," she remarked doubtfully when it was done, "but you're no pea-sheller. You'd better go lie down again after that effort."

"You don't even believe I'm a sailor, then?" he challenged. "How can I convince you? Shall I box the compass, or do you want me to recite the ropes on a full-rigged ship?"

"Run along and take a nap," she returned. "Invalids mustn't overtax their brains."

For the first two days after getting out of bed he was willing enough to play the convalescent. His stern nurse laid down rigid rules covering food, exercise, and hours of rest. The last-mentioned included going to bed at sundown.

She allowed him the privilege, however, of leaving his door ajar, closing it herself after he had fallen asleep. Thus he happened to overhear a scrap of conversation between Jessica and her grandfather.

Captain Zed was in bed soon after night had fallen, his occupation compelling him to turn out at three, get his fish out of the nets, and have them, iced and barreled, on the steamboat wharf in time to load on the morning boat, which sailed at seven. Jessica, although her grandfather's housekeeper, was relieved of the necessity of rising to prepare his breakfast, the old man frequently going without, or, when hungry, sharing with his gang, the members of which had their own house.

"I looked at th' Polly Ann's compass this afternoon, Jess," he remarked in grave tones, pushing his chair back from the supper-table.

"Did you find out what was the matter with it?" the girl inquired.

"Well, it was far enough off to throw you out coming across from New Galilee, so 't if you hadn't happened to run across some one in the fog you might have gone clear to Europe before you knew you were wrong."

"Yes, I know all that, grandfather," said Jessica. "But how did it happen? Was the needle demagnetized or anything like that?"

"No, that wasn't it," said Captain Zed slowly. "Sometimes a compass goes wrong of its own account, and

sometimes it's helped. This one was helped."

"Why, what do you mean? How could you tell?" she cried.

"The needle was all right. What happened was that the disk had been twisted around?"

"The disk? The face of the compass?"

"So that north wasn't north any longer, and south was something else. That couldn't happen of itself."

"But, grandfather," she began, and stopped as the enormity of the thing dawned on her.

"I know, girl," he said. "It means that if some one was out in a fog relying on that compass to get back to land again, th' chances would be a hundred to one against them ever seeing home any more. It's murder pure and simple, that's what it is."

"How dreadful!" the girl exclaimed with a little shudder in her voice. "Who could have done it?"

"I don't know that, Jess," Captain Zed replied. "I wouldn't believe there was anybody in the world mean enough to try to turn a trick like that, but there's how it is. Anyway, we won't leave the compass in th' Polly Ann's locker any more. I've brought it here and put it up there on the clock shelf when you want it. And don't you worry about it none. I just told you so that you'd be careful."

The girl remained silent, and presently Captain Zed arose and lumbered off to bed. Then Jack fell asleep in his turn.

He had forgotten by morning what he had overheard, and perhaps would not have thought of it again but that the sight of the compass-box on the shelf reminded him. Curiosity spurred him on to ask for an explanation.

"It's very queer," Jessica admitted. "I don't know at all who did it. If I knew I wouldn't let the matter rest with talking about it. You say you are a sailor, so you understand what it means to have a compass in error."

"But you were saying something about being sorry for having come to Barratry Island to fish," Jack reminded her. "It's none of my business, to be sure."

"It's no secret," Jessica replied. "Grandfather and I are from the mainland—from New Galilee. All of the men in grandfather's fishing gang but one are from the mainland.

"The Barratry Islanders boast that they never let a mainlander fish off the island. Grandfather would not have come here to fish if it hadn't been that he took over these shanties for a debt. He is a poor man, and in order to get anything out of the debt, as long as he couldn't sell them, he decided to use them himself.

"A man named Merton Potter—they call him 'Buck' Potter because he is so big and strong—had been living here for the past two or three seasons. Grandfather tried to get him to buy, and when he refused asked him to pay rent. But Potter would not do that, either.

"Instead, he told grandfather that he would keep on using the outfit and defied him to put him out. When grandfather brought his traps and boats over here and took possession, Potter was furious. He swore he would never let grandfather fish off Barratry.

"If it were only Potter alone, it wouldn't be worth a moment's thought. The trouble is he merely expresses the sentiments of the islanders. They claim to believe that the fish in these waters are their exclusive property, which nobody else may share.

"That is why I am afraid of trouble. There has been a little already. One of our men—Elmer Trask—got into a fight with some islanders at Carroll's saloon over in the summer settlement and was beaten up so badly that grandfather had to send him back home, so he is a man short. But that wasn't anything. Elmer had no business to be in the saloon.

"This affair of the compass, however, is a serious thing. I can't under-

stand how it happened. It doesn't seem possible even a Barratry Islander would do a thing like that, which means life or death to the person relying on the compass. It must have happened by accident."

"Where is Potter now?" asked Jack.

"He is number one man in the Simcox gang," the girl replied. "Mark Simcox runs a fishing outfit just across the cove. Here—you can see his place from the window." She pointed to it. "His traps and gill nets are set out near grandfather's, and he even had the impudence to say that grandfather had set on his locations.

"Grandfather has a will of his own, though. He isn't easily frightened. He told Mr. Simcox he could carry it to the inland fisheries commission if he wanted to, but until he got an order from them he shouldn't take up his traps.

"Now you know all our troubles," she ended with a laugh. "See what a dangerous port you came into from the storm. At any moment the house is likely to be burned about your ears."

"I'm not scared," Jack returned. "I'm rather used to fighting."

Restored to health, as he was within less than a week of his arrival on Barratry, he was confronted with the necessity of considering his immediate future. The obvious course was to return forthwith to New York and fight his way back to the standing his folly had forfeited.

Oddly enough, the thought of the associations such a course must entail discovered a hitherto unknown distaste for them. Oddly, since so brief a period had elapsed since to be the hero of stage women and fat men with diamond studs had been as the breath of life.

These people among whom he had been thrown were of a different star. They breathed air vitalized by the ocean instead of vitiated by perfume and cigar-smoke. He wanted to stay among them, at least for a time.

But how should he do that? Now that he was himself again, it was impossible to continue a pensioner at Captain Zed's, even if it were permitted. If only he knew something about the fishing business, he would offer himself to fill the place left vacant by Elmer Trask.

His experience with Butcher Horlock and Vesta Dawn had drawn a little from the abundant store of happy-go-lucky self-confidence which had been his principal inspiration until that unfortunate affair. In a healthful reaction, he questioned whether he were even equal to the requirements of fishing.

Then the decision was taken out of his hands. Captain Zed himself advanced the proposal at the supper-table.

"Seeing 's you didn't bring anything ashore except what you stood in," said he, "I suppose you'll be looking for a berth?"

"I've got to," Jack replied.

"If you want to try fishing, I can give you a chance," the old man offered. "Ten a week and your share. I'll outfit you against your first week's pay. You bunk with the gang. For as long as we're both satisfied. What do you say?"

"I'll take it," Jack agreed promptly. "Show me my bunk."

CHAPTER VIII.

A HOSTILE MOVE.

A HAND grasped Jack Garrett's shoulder and shook him vigorously.

"Turn out!" came the command.

The suddenly awakened man grunted and stretched. He was forbidden further sleep by the repetition of the order as Jim Tarkis, the ex-whaler who served Cap'n Zed's gang in the capacity of cook and housekeeper, went from man to man.

The savory odor of ham and eggs and coffee, tickling sluggish senses, brought full consciousness. It was

dark in the bunk-room save for the inadequate illumination thrown by a kerosene lamp through the open door of the general assembly-room beyond.

"Beats all how much earlier three o'clock is some mornin's than 'tis others," came from a shadowy figure sitting on the edge of the berth below Jack's. It was Harley Whaley speaking.

"Trouble with you is you can't keep away from the girls, Harl," volleyed Anse Burdick. "If you throw any more bluefish overboard to-day like you did yest'day morning, Cap'n Zed'll be in your hair."

"Oh, you pshaw!" rejoined Harley. "Just because my foot slipped when I was gaffin' him you think it's girls. What's girls got to do with bluefish, anyway?"

It was the customary three o'clock in the morning badinage. Jack let himself down, drew on trousers and flannel shirt over the underclothing in which he had slept, and squeezed his feet into the heavy fishing-boots.

The salt-encrusted clothing was soggy with the moisture it had been collecting from the air all night, but he knew it would soon warm up and be comfortable enough, and the ham and eggs and coffee shouted to be eaten. If Jim Tarkis had taken the added trouble to mix up a batch of biscuit happiness would be complete.

His toilet was finished with a duck in the pail of ice-cold water on the bench outside. He clomped back into the assembly-room and took his place at table.

"Um-um—hot biscuits!" Harley Whaley was exclaiming. "Pass 'em down here, Anse."

Anse Burdick removed a supply for himself and urged his neighbors to do likewise before complying with Harley's request.

"Better grab a handful, Jack," he warned. "When a feller that's been out to see his girl the night before gets started on hot biscuits—"

He stopped suddenly with his eyes fixed on Harley's face. His features settled into an expression of surprise which was not at all artificial.

"Aw, let up, can't you, Anse?" Harley complained. "Th' ain't no law against goin' to see a girl that I know of."

"Crickety cripes, Harl, what's struck you?" Anse exclaimed.

His question drew the attention of the others to Harley. The recipient of this attention blushed obviously even under the deep chestnut of his tan.

"Wh—what d'you mean, Anse?" he stammered.

"One black eye, cut on th' other side of the face, and I dunno's the nose is quite plumb," Anse catalogued. "What does t'other feller look like, Harl?"

"Oh, that?" The unfortunate tried to pass it off with an air of indifference. "Comin' back last night, blacker'n th' inside of Jonah, I got tangled up in a net dryin' over back here a piece and th' jeesly thing threw me. That's all."

"That story'd do to tell a summer boarder," was Anse's incredulous comment. "Harl, look daddy in th' eye and tell the truth. You went over to Carroll's place last night. You met up with some o' these Bar'try Islanders, an' they trimmed you. Now ain't that so?"

Harley Whaley was a poor liar. In vain he denied and expostulated. The exactitude of Anse Burdick's guess stood confessed in his face, and was pressed home until he was compelled to tell the story. It was not greatly to his credit.

"Just one glass o' beer—that was all I had," he protested. "'Twas Bart Whipple started th' trouble. I'd 'a' licked him good only for Buck Potter butting in. Between them what could I do?"

"Prob'ly you forgot, Harl, that Cap'n Zed gave orders for us all to

keep away from Carroll's place after the way Elmer Trask got beat up," broke in Herb Mann's deep, rich bass. Herb was number one man of the Hooper gang, Cap'n Zed's first lieutenant, and what he said carried weight.

"Honest, Herb, I wa'n't loafing around there or nothing," Harley excused himself. "'Twas ten o'clock when I got started for home—"

"His girl turned him out," Anse put in.

"'And,' thinks I, 'it's a long walk and there's no harm in just one glass of beer and Cap'n Zed won't mind.' You wouldn't hurt his feelins by tellin' on me, would you?"

"Cap'n Zed don't care if you drink a bar'l of beer," Herb returned. "Only thing he don't want is any excuse for trouble with th' islanders. They's been enough already. I guess we won't none of us tell on you this time, Harl, seein' you got caught up with so, but don't let it happen again, that's all."

Harley stuffed half a biscuit in his mouth gratefully and escaped through the door just in time to dodge one of Anse Burdick's barbed references to fellers that called on girls.

"Well, boys?" said Herb Mann, with an inquiring glance around.

"By Cripes, them are good biscuit," sighed Charlie Hinkley, pushing back his plate regretfully. "I dunno but what I'll have to let my belt out a notch before pulling on a trap."

"You'll get to remind folks of a sea-robin when you tickle his belly if you don't take somethin' for that appetite of yours, Charlie," declared Anse. He himself was the last man from the table, following the gang with the shattered remnant of a cruller in his hand.

The east was translucently gray, promise of a perfect day, as they set out in the broad-beamed launch, with the work-boats towing astern. The sea, both within and beyond the point, was like glass—like molten glass, with an oily, rhythmic heave which might have disturbed less accustomed stomachs. But the only regret these sturdy souls felt was that their capacities were limited.

"Pull the gill net this mornin', cap'n?" asked Herb Mann from his post at the wheel in the bow.

"Guess we better, Herb," Captain Hooper agreed. "First off we'll take the number one trap. That's on our way to the gill net."

Twenty minutes brought them alongside the trap. Charley Hinkley remained on the launch, with the captain and Herb Mann. The others took to the work-boats. Each had his definitely assigned task and place.

The captain's and Herb Mann's work was to scoop the fish out of the trap with the long-handled pole-net, and the "gaft hook," as the fishermen called it, for the heavier specimens. The two dories went to the far corners of the trap and began pursing.

For the benefit of the uninitiate it may be explained that a trap-net is a mesh-bag reaching deep into the water—an equilateral mesh-bag with sides fifty feet long.

From one corner stretches the leader, a wall of netting several hundred feet in length. This is set across a current. Wandering fish, singly or in schools according to their habit, strike the leader and, nosing their way along, pass through a funnel-shaped opening into the trap proper.

There they remain until helped out by the fishermen. For although the upper edges of the trap are level with the water, being buoyed by cork-floats and anchored at the corners, the imprisoned catch lacks either the power or the wit, perhaps both, to leap the barrier and escape.

Three weeks had passed, and Jack Garrett felt himself a fixture in his new berth. Having accepted it on an impulse he had never tried to analyze, it was the more gratifying that it had proved so much to his taste.

Little by little the memories of

Broadway, of the prize-ring, and of his old manager, Sam Levine, had been overlaid with a veneer of new experiences, to scratch which and reach the lower layer called for an effort he lacked incentive to make.

His new associates had accepted him without question. They seemed to like him, and he reciprocated their liking. Charlie Hinkley voiced the common sentiment when he remarked:

"'Tain't no matter what a feller's been. Mebbe Jack was a barge hand and mebbe he wasn't. It's th' way he does his work in th' boats that counts."

He did his work well because he enjoyed it. He enjoyed it because—well, that was hard to explain. One certain thing was that the opportunity of frequent encounters with Jessica Hooper, who as his rescuer took a personal interest in his new career, was far from distasteful.

And this also was something new. If he had ever done well before, it had been solely a by-product of the pleasure he took in the game. Justifying another's good opinion, winning success to lay the laurels at the feet of some one else, was an incentive unknown before he had come to Barratry Island.

But in a past he was trying to forget a girl had told him that "nobody loves a loser," and the tremendous truth of the statement had struck him between the eyes. It will be seen that there were varied and complicated reasons why he was doing his best for Captain Zed.

Underrunning trap-lines was back-breaking, hand-tearing labor, yet there was in it a sufficient element of chance to keep interest acute. What might not the catch reveal to-day which it had not included hitherto?

At the first approach two or three small sand-sharks were seen restlessly feeling their way along the mesh near the surface. Captain Hooper's pass at one with a gaff being too slow, they sank from sight. To all appearance the water was otherwise void of life.

The men in the dories knew better, however. As they threw empty handfuls of net behind, narrowing the cubic area of the trap, they could tell by the increasing weight that there was a catch. Frightened, it had sunk to the floor of the net in a vain effort to elude the relentless enemy.

About half of the lines had been under-run when Captain Zed called to the men.

"Hold on a minute," he said.

Jack saw him poised at the rail of the launch, gaff in hand. Presently he made a quick thrust. The surface of the water was thrashed into red foam. Herb Mann stepped to his side with another gaff, with which he stabbed into the center of the commotion.

The struggle was fierce, but brief. The object of the attack was a great, grinning dogfish, pet aversion of the men who depend on the harvests of the deep for their daily bread. They worked it over the side of the trap, turned it adrift, and the surface of the sea resumed its oily texture.

Life began to manifest itself in the narrowing confines of the net. Great, lazy flounders rose from the depths, flat and broad as the head of a barrel, nosing with unbecoming anxiety the cruel mesh. As often as one came within reach of a gaff it was pronged and lifted neatly into the launch to remonstrate flappingly on the slimp floor.

A few weakfish, gracefully formed and beautifully marked, were added to the flounders. Then Jack caught a glint of reddish brown far under the surface.

"Scup!" he cried to his dorymate, who passed the glad tidings along.

"Go easy there!" Captain Zed warned. "Scup are worth money now."

As at a signal, the school, evidently a large one, gave over its restless swimming and settled, a dead weight, to the bottom.

"Haul away," the captain directed. "There's no reason why we can't lift

them. It's a new trap. Just a strong, steady haul—"

Mesh by mesh the net came over the gunwales. The dories were brought close together by their work. At last the scoop nets could reach the scup, and began bailing them into the launch, a peck measure full at a dip.

With them came other unfortunates whose destiny was to provide a meal for the lords of creation. There were sea bass, black-backed and gray-bellied; a barrel of butterfish, some big mackerel which had strayed from their school, a few bluefish, king fish, blackfish—the list is too long for recital. Also there were sea robins, anglers, toad-fish, and others of the rank and file without marketable value. These were assisted back into the free ocean without regard for their feelings.

"All aboard, boys," shouted Herb Mann when the catch had been made. "We'll take the gill net next."

Captain Zed's outfit included only one gill net, and the claims advanced by the Simcox gang to the position in which it was set had led him to wish he had none. Having been within his rights in placing it, however, it was impossible for him to recede. It was three days since he had visited it.

The sun was up, brilliant and warm, of cheerful augury. By eight o'clock the southwest breeze would lift. Before that time, however, the gang would be ashore, the fish iced and barreled and on their way to market, and everybody would be sharp-set for a "mug-up."

"What's th' matter, Herb?" Captain Zed asked as the number one man brought his wheel over and the launch swung around.

"Where's that dad-blamed net?" Herb returned. "She can't have drifted, with them big anchors and no wind to speak of for three days."

The rest of the gang gave over smoking and loafing to stand up and look for the net. If they were near the net it should have disclosed its presence by its floats.

"Sure you got the range, Herb?" Anse Burdick asked.

"Of course I did. What do you think?" the steersman returned impatiently. "Right there where we came about. I'll go back and you fellows look and see. The range is that white rock on the point and the peak of the lighthouse one way, an' Nate Daniels's shanty and the church for th' other line. Now look sharp."

The circle was made again. There was no doubt about the range, for every man yelled when it was established. But there was no gill net.

"Now what do you make out o' that?" Captain Zed demanded after they had cruised fruitlessly for another ten minutes.

At first there was no answer. Then Peter Gomez voiced the belief of every member of the gang.

"What I think," he declared, "is that some one cut that there net adrift—just plumb cut it loose. That's what I think."

Captain Zed looked at him briefly. Something helpless and appealing in the old fisherman's expression touched Jack.

"I guess you're right, Pete," he admitted finally. "New gear and good knots; I tied them myself. Somebody cut that gill net adrift, and somebody wants war. Well, we'll let 'em have it."

CHAPTER IX.

ON A WAR FOOTING.

LIKE a wise commander, Captain Zed kept his own counsel among his men. It was to his granddaughter, Jessica, that he unburdened his soul, obtaining a clearer view of his problems by discussing them with the girl.

"You are perfectly certain, grandfather," she said, "that the net couldn't have broken loose by accident? The lines weren't chafed or anything like that?"

"Certain sure, girl," he replied.

"One thing, it was all new gear. We pulled th' net only three days ago. It was all right then, and there ain't been any storms since."

"It doesn't seem possible anybody would be mean enough to destroy a net like that," the girl ventured. "And there's no way of telling who did it."

"That's the wu'st of it," her grandfather growled. "We kin suspicion an' suspicion, but how're we goin' to know who did it? If it was th' fu'st time, I might think it was an act of God, as the corp'ration lawyers put it when they're sued for damages.

"But you know 'tain't, Jessica. There was Elmer Trask got beat up so I had to send him home to New Galilee—Simcox's gang it was did that, with Buck Potter eggin' them on. An' Elmer as peaceable a feller as you'd wish to see.

"Then that seine net I'd spread out to dry was sprinkled with wet gurry so 't had to be all cleaned up fresh. And th' work-boats turned adrift th' other night. If a wind had come up they would have been stove all to pieces.

"No, girl, there's no way of tellin' who did it, but I can make an almighty close guess. The question now is, how to keep 'em from doing worse than that? They're set on keepin' furriners, as they call 'em, from fishin' off Barratry, and I'm just as set on stickin' here. What's to be done?"

Clearly action was called for. They debated the matter at length. One only possible insurance against further depredations presented itself, namely, the setting of a patrol at night.

The offenses against Captain Zed and his property had all been committed at night, and such further ones as might be contemplated would assuredly be tried under cover of darkness. The layout of the fishing settlement adapted itself to the maintenance of a patrol, assuming that the aggressors were near neighbors of the Hooper gang.

The fishing shanties were stuck down at the shore ends of their flimsy docks, near the head of the harbor. Each dock led into its own fish-house, where were the ice-boxes and odds and ends of paraphernalia.

The working dories were either run up on the beach at night or left in the water with lines bow and stern, while the bulkier launches were moored at the head of the harbor, clear of the channel. The huddle of fishermen's shanties formed a thin line not more than a third of a mile in extent, so that it was easily possible for a single sentinel to keep track of any one astir after dark.

Having obtained his granddaughter's approval of the plan, Captain Zed put it into effect at once. The men, with a single exception, readily agreed to it. The temper of the islanders had been sufficiently revealed to show them the absolute necessity of some such course if they were to remain on the island.

The grumbler was Peter Gomez. Peter, despite his name, was as much a Yankee as any of the gang, the blood of his remote Portuguese ancestor having undergone the dilution of several generations. By birth and early training a Barratry Islander, Peter had worked on the mainland long enough for this to have been forgotten by his fellows.

"I'd like to know when a feller's goin' to sleep," he growled. "Seems's if 'twas enough to have to turn out at three every mornin', earlier 'n any other gang that's trap settin', without havin' to stay up all night, too."

"You know th' cap'n wouldn't ask us to if 'twasn't needful, Pete," Herb Mann pointed out. "These islanders that think they're goin' to send us home with our tails between our legs will l'arn a thing or two before they get quit with Cap'n Zed."

When his turn came, however, Peter took it good-naturedly enough. It was a hardship, too. The only concession to the man on patrol was that he could lay off on the following after-

noon, free from the eternal overhauling of gear which occupied all hands after the day's catch was shipped.

Five nights passed without incident. Then came Jack Garrett's turn, as the newest member of the gang, to go on patrol.

"Keep your eyes peeled, Jack," Herb Mann warned. "Th' longer they are gettin' to their dirty work th' dirtier it'll be when it does come. You don't know these islanders th' way th' rest of us do that have been brought up around here.

"It's up to you to-night whether we keep on doin' business on Bar'try or go home whipped. We've kept close-mouthed about our watch, and Buck Potter and his crowd ain't on to it yet. You can look for deviltry from them almost any time."

Jack took up his sentinel duties with a full determination to report as clean a record as his predecessors. The night was moonless, but clear, and heavy with the odor of the ocean in June.

He satisfied himself first that everything was as it should be by a turn the length of the village, followed by an examination of Captain Zed's fish-house, dock, and dories. Finding all in order, he sat for a while on an upturned lobster-pot at the water's edge, thinking over something which happened to have come to his notice that day.

It was a scrap from a week-old paper one of the men had brought in—a sporting-page paragraph. It read:

> Manager Sam Levine's confidence in the ability of his unnamed entry to pull down the championship appears to be wholly genuine. What the public thinks will become known when he tells who his fighter is, two weeks before the battle, as stipulated by the articles. Monk Reilly's sportsmanship in agreeing to these novel conditions is widely commended.

The words stirred into vibration an almost forgotten chord. The feverish excitement and competition from which he had been snatched had been until to-day almost as remote as one of the stars twinkling overhead.

So Sam Levine had thus promptly found a successor for his unworthy self? Jack was forced to admit that it was a perfectly logical, fair proceeding. The time had been, and that only a few weeks earlier, when to meet the champion and fight for the belt marked the acme of his own ambition. Now it was a better man than he that had the chance.

He wondered who it could be. The list of those who could face Reilly with even the smallest chance of success was extremely limited. At its top stood Butch Horlock. Jack knew himself amply Horlock's master, despite the knockout. But the Butcher had proved himself the better man in the matter of training. There was a sting to that reflection.

Did he regret the changed circumstances which had removed him from the fierce delights of the ring? A light footfall drew his attention. Turning quickly, he heard the rustle of skirts and saw Jessica Hooper drawing near.

"Who goes there?" he challenged.

"A friend," the girl answered in the same spirit. "Is all quiet along the Potomac to-night? I had forgotten it was your turn to sit up. It was hot in the house and I couldn't sleep."

"Take this easy chair," Jack offered, yielding up the lobster-pot. "Everything's quiet so far. The dishonest sleep the sleep of the just."

"And honest folks stay awake," she rejoined. "Are you sorry yet for having turned fisherman? It must seem tame to you after the exciting life of a—let's see, barge-hand, wasn't it?"

"I'm only sorry I didn't turn fisherman earlier," he said. "I find compensations even in night patrolling."

"For instance?"

"I spare your blushes," he laughed.

She was silent for a couple of minutes, staring into the still darkness that held the harbor, a knee clasped

between her hands in one of the boyish attitudes that suited her so well. The man, lying on the dry sand at her side, was subtly stirred by the perfume of her hair and garments.

"Sometimes I think you weren't really a barge-hand, after all," she began presently. "Not that I have ever known many. Jerry Knoedler, who is one of Carroll's steady customers, used to be one. But I shouldn't say you and he had much in common."

"How can you doubt the evidence of your own senses?" he parried. "You picked me out of the wreckage of a barge, and barges don't carry passengers."

"That is so," she admitted. "So you must have been a barge-hand. Why don't you tell me it's none of my business? Grandfather says you have the makings of a fisherman, which is the highest compliment he can pay. Grandfather is very much worried," she added in a graver tone.

"Worried? How?"

"It's his business. I don't know that I ought to tell you, but it means everything to him to succeed in his fishing off Barratry this season. All he has is tied up in his outfit."

"He has a loyal crew," was all Jack could think of to reply.

"Yes, the crew is loyal," she replied musingly. "Loyalty is a great thing. It's a greater thing that it's a skilful, courageous crew. The one quality without the other is of small value."

"Loyalty, skill, and courage are indeed a brave trio," Jack replied. He fell silent, his statement turning on him with a personal application. The old life was vividly present to-night as a result of the vagrant newspaper paragraph he had chanced on.

Wherein had he himself been found wanting? He had courage—none who knew his record could deny that. And he had skill. But without loyalty they had been, so far as Sam Levine was concerned, and consequently as bearing on his own career, as void of significance as sounding brass.

"I'm going in now — good night," said Jessica abruptly. She was gone almost before he could jump to his feet. He concluded it was time to take another turn toward the harbor head.

He stepped along noiselessly, depending on his ears to tell him whether any one else was astir. The shanties were wrapped in darkness. The light of a candle glimmered briefly from Captain Zed's window, and was extinguished, from which he knew Jessica had gone to bed.

An unanswered question recurred. No, he did not regret the old life. Of the manner of his leaving it he could not say as much. A chance to wipe out that stain would be acceptable.

The air was so still he distinctly heard the hour of eleven striking from the church clock at Oldham, the village three miles away where the big hotels were. On its heels he caught the sound of a splash in the harbor.

His first thought was that it was a fish breaking water. The noise came from a point some distance ahead, in the direction of Captain Zed's powerboat. Intuition came to his aid, telling him that the disturbance was caused by something else besides a restless fish.

His duty was to find out what it was, and he started toward the harbor's head on a run. He had come almost abreast of the boat, moored out a quarter of a mile from shore, when his advance was arrested by the sharp crack of a weapon. Simultaneously a bullet sang past his ear.

By the merest chance he caught the flash of the firearm. It came from an abandoned and decaying one-room shanty standing a little back from the beach near the harbor head. There was little room to doubt that a deliberate attempt on his life had been made.

Or was it merely another move in the warfare on Captain Zed—a part of the game to scare the foreigners away from these shores? It did not matter so far as the young man was

concerned. His single thought was to achieve prompt revenge. The blood sang in his ears from anger.

He charged toward the shanty with complete unconcern as to the likelihood of a second shot following the first. To get there before the discharger of firearms escaped was a motive exclusive of all others. He came close enough to make out the shanty's black bulk, and on the point of rounding the corner was tripped by an end of rope shrewdly stretched across his path, pitched forward, and measured his length on the gravel.

He had hardly touched the ground before he was buried under a mass of humanity. His assailants, whoever they were, evidently preferred to eliminate all chances of miscarriage. One sat astride his shoulders and ground his face into the earth. Another perched on his legs. The third whipped his arms behind his back and tied his wrists with a sailor's dexterity.

This was accomplished less easily than it is told, for Jack, although shaken by the unexpected tumble, struggled with all the strength and experience of his well-trained muscles. The grunts of his otherwise silent captors told him they were meeting more resistance than they had figured on. The man on his shoulders cursed under his breath, driving Jack's face farther into the earth.

In spite of the latter's best efforts, he was very soon triced up, wrists and ankles, and silenced with a rude but effective gag. Then, still silently, his assailants picked him up, face downward, carried him to the abandoned shanty, and threw him inside. The door was pulled to and locked with a spike thrust through the rusty hasp on the outside.

This Jack learned later. For the present he was beside himself with rage. He had fallen into a trap with the easy stupidity of a silly fish. The shot apparently fired at him had been only a bait to decoy him within attacking distance.

What to do now? Freedom was the urgent demand of the moment. The attacking party had something else in mind than the temporary imprisonment of a member of the Hooper gang. The responsibility was on him of circumventing their malevolent designs. He tugged at his bonds, straining right and left, in desperate efforts to break loose.

The knots were well tied, and at first he was unable to assert that he was making any headway. The gag between his teeth felt dirty and smelled abominably of ancient fish. A muffled sound as of wood on metal reached him while he pulled and jerked and worked his wrists and ankles.

After many minutes he found his hands were gaining a little play. He redoubled his exertions. Now he could pull one hand out as far as the muscular base of his thumb, and after as long again it squeezed by.

It was the work of an instant to snatch the gag from his mouth, slash through the fetters that bound his ankles, and, a little bruised and lame, put his shoulder to the rotting old door. Under the pressure the staple pulled out altogether, and Jack was a free agent again.

He could have called for help, but it occurred to him such a proceeding would be unprofitable. It would direct the attention of the entire waterfront to the secret of the Hooper gang —that a patrol was being maintained. First he would investigate.

The fish-house and the work-dories were as he had left them. He walked all around the buildings where the captain and his comrades were sleeping; everything was as it should be. Then he jumped into one of the dories and pulled to the head of the harbor to examine the launch.

That also appeared undamaged. The discovery reassured him tremendously, for it was here he had feared to find fatal depredations. He took the canvas cover off the motor and went over it

piece by piece until he was convinced that all was intact.

This unforeseen result puzzled him greatly. If the object was not to wreak injury on the physical equipment of the Hooper gang, what could it have been? Surely these Barratry Islanders did not think to frighten Captain Zed's men away by harmless shots fired in the dark and rough horse-play? They must know them better than that.

By the time he got back to Captain Zed's dock there was a light in the ganghouse kitchen, showing that old Jim Tarkis was up and around. Morning and another working day were at hand. Taking counsel with himself, Jack made up his mind.

Captain Zed was worried enough already. It would not help matters any to tell of the night's adventure. Instead of doing that, he would lay the affair before Herb Mann, leaving it with him whether to spread the news or not.

Half an hour later he joined the rest of the gang at the breakfast-table. Nobody asked any questions. Anse Burdick was busy prying into the secrets of Harley Whaley's philanderings, and the remainder divided their attention between this matutinal fixture and the products of Jim Tarkis's skill.

The captain was taking breakfast with his men this morning. It was the season of the vernal equinox, and the fishing was at its height. Everybody was in a hurry to be off to the traps.

They started, therefore, a little earlier than customary. Arrived at the power-boat, all climbed aboard, made fast the dories' painters, and the captain and his number one man turned their attention to the engine. The carburetor was primed, and Herb turned the wheel over.

A fraction of a second later he had a racing engine shrieking for his attention. He jumped to the battery switch and threw it off.

"What in tarnal creation's th' matter?" yelled Captain Zed. "Here, Charlie—Anse—throw over a kedge. We've dropped the buoy. What's happened now?"

"Acts like she'd lost her propeller, cap'n," replied Herb Mann in his cool, deliberate way. "That's it sure as you're born. She wouldn't race like that for any other reason."

"Lost her propeller?" the captain repeated. "She was all right when we put her up yest'day."

"I'm afraid she's done it just th' same," Herb repeated. "Let's take a look."

Charlie Hinkley had forestalled the idea by pulling a dory alongside and jumping into it. He drew a wet arm out of the water and made his report.

"She's gone cleaner 'n a smelt. Pin an' all."

"Who was on patrol last night?" the captain demanded.

"I was," said Jack Garrett.

"Well, what did you see? Anybody around? This happened since we come in yest'day."

"Somebody fired a gun at me from up the beach yonder," Jack explained. "When I ran up there I was tripped, tied up, and thrown into the shanty."

This astonishing statement fell like a thunderclap on the ears of his fellows. It was so much beyond anything they could have expected that for a moment all hands, even including Captain Zed, were dumfounded. The old man recovered first to inquire in an awed voice:

"You were shot at an' tied up, and didn't say nothing about it at breakfast time? Why?"

"I was going to tell Herb Mann just as soon as I had a chance alone," Jack replied. "I didn't want to bother you with it until there was something really to tell."

Captain Zed appeared more dazed by this statement than by the first. He flushed red with anger as he shot his questions at Jack.

"Sufferin' mackerel, why didn't you want to bother me about it? Whose outfit is this, anyway? If you were

tied, how'd you get away? Tell us that?"

Jack explained the processes of his release. Before he had quite finished Peter Gomez had leaped into a boat and was off for the shore.

"I'll look and see what's in th' shanty," he called back.

Under Captain Zed's continued questioning, abetted by Herb Mann and the rest, Jack's whole story came out. He had a feeling while he was telling it that it transcended his companions' capacities for belief. Incredulity was written on their faces.

"And you didn't hear anything else goin' on before or after you was thrown into th' shanty?" the captain asked.

"I told you—something like a mallet pounding."

"Well, anyway, th' propeller's gone, and it'll take a week to get another. Here's Pete."

The absentee sculled up to the power-boat. To the inquiring glances of his fellows he shook his head.

"Far's I could see," he declared, "th' shanty's just th' same as ever. Anyway, there ain't any ropes or things lyin' around in it. You can come an' see for yourselves."

CHAPTER X.

BUCK POTTER.

His eyes on Peter Gomez, Jack felt the various expressions of surprise with which his mates had received his story altering to unbelief and suspicion.

"No ropes?" he cried. "On the floor where I left them—did you look? And the door—"

"Th' door was open, of course," Pete returned. "It's always been open. 'Tain't any different. I couldn't find any ropes like you said. But you can all come and look for yourselves."

Captain Zed gave an impatient snort.

"What's th use o' that?" he demanded. "Question is now, what're we goin' to do? This boat is out o' c'mission till we can get another propeller. That other business can wait. Come to think on it, Eb Spencer over to New Gallilee 's got a spare that would do till we can get one by steamer. But that don't help any."

"Th' Polly Ann?" Herb Mann suggested.

"Then what'll we pull trap with?" the old man demanded. "As 'tis, we'll have to wait till it breezes up before we can get out with th' catboat, and it'll be an all day's job to bring our fish home. No, we can't spare th' Polly Ann."

Affairs were apparently at an impasse. Set down in the midst of a hostile population, there was no chance of winning a helping hand from any islander.

The steamer went only to the nearest point of rail communication, a place where the loss of the propeller could not be made good. A special messenger would find it necessary to go from there to the first city which boasted a marine hardware store, and could not hope to catch the boat until the second day, arriving back at nightfall. Then there was the task of setting the propeller—altogether not a week, but three days of inconvenience and loss.

"What say, Herb?" Captain Zed inquired.

"If I had the feller that stole that propeller in a room with my shoes an' stockin's off—" began the usually imperturbable number one man.

"We'll catch up with them yet," his employer declared. "Thing now is to decide what's best to do. There goes th' Simcox gang."

A power boat towing a couple of dories swung past. The Hooper gang stared at it moodily. No salutations were exchanged between the two parties of men; indeed, it seemed to those aboard the crippled launch that the Simcoxes rather ostentatiously turned their faces the other way.

Jack Garrett had been revolving a

remark of the captain's. Somebody named Spencer at New Galilee had a spare propeller. New Galilee, as he had found out, was twelve miles away.

It was only too apparent that he was under suspicion of neglect of duty, if not worse—a neglect which had led to this disaster. It did not occur to him at the moment that timidity was the obvious explanation his companions found for his failure to prevent the disabling of the launch. On the other hand, that his story had been heard with doubt, if not downright disbelief, was readily apparent.

"Captain," he ventured.

"Well, what is it?" The old man gave him a hostile glance.

"If there's a propeller at New Galilee, I could go over and get it. Perhaps it's my fault in a way that this boat was put out of commission. Anyway—"

"How'll you get across — swim?" Captain Zed jerked back. "I told you, didn't I, that th' Polly Ann's got t' do th' work of th' launch?"

"A man could row," Jack replied.

"You'd find it a stiffer row than you bargained for, young feller," said the old man. "Twelve miles there and twelve miles back. And a sou'-west breeze against you comin'. Besides, I can't spare th' dories."

"I'll get a dory," Jack persisted. "There's one on the beach. Suppose I took that?"

"Then you'd have Buck Potter in your hair," Herb Mann volunteered. "He's big as a bear an' twice as strong an' three times as mean."

"I'll risk it. Give me a note to Spencer, captain, and let me try," Jack pleaded.

The captain looked doubtful. So also did his men. A twelve mile row in the calm of the early morning was feasible, but a twenty-four mile row, with a head wind half of the way, was another matter.

"I dunno," he said at last. "I'd like mighty well to get that there spare propeller of Eb Spencer's. But Buck Potter wouldn't let you take his dory any more'n he'd fly. Even if you could get acrost an' back," he added.

"I'll manage about the dory. All you have to do is give me the day and a note to Spencer," said Jack eagerly. "Buck Potter's gone out with his gang."

Captain Zed made up his mind suddenly.

"You kin have th' day an' th' note," he said. "An' if you get back, we won't say no more about this business of last night. But if you don't come back here with a propeller, you needn't come back at all, and if you get into any trouble with Buck Potter 'count of his dory, that's your lookout and nobody else's. Is it agreed?"

Jack asked no more. While he and the captain went ashore in one of the work-boats, the remainder of the gang used the other to tow the launch up on the beach, it being high tide, for an examination of her shaft when the water should fall and leave her dry.

Equipped with the note to Captain Eb Spencer, he routed a pair of oars out from under the Simcox fish-house, launched the dory and set off. His fellows working around the power-boat on the beach watched him depart without a sign. The only comment made among them was Anse Burdick's.

"I'd hate to be in his boots when Buck Potter finds he's took his dory," said he.

Captain Zed had insisted on Jack's taking the Polly Ann's compass, long since corrected, and had given him his course. Although this was superfluous if, as it promised, the weather held fair, for on a clear day New Galilee was discernible from high points on Barratry. Still, it might come in handy. Vision is of restricted range at the water's level.

Jack figured how long it would take him to cross and return. The tide was at flood, and at present the sea was smooth. At four miles an hour he should make New Galilee in three

hours, or in four allowing for the offshore current he would strike farther on.

He should arrive at New Galilee between eight and nine. Shipping the propeller ought not to be a long operation. He would take advantage of the tail ebb to slip out of the harbor, and be well offshore before the return caught him. He figured on getting back to the island in the early afternoon.

He rowed briskly, insensible to the beauties of the morning. He felt himself on the outs with fate. Misadventure dogged his heels, and the last had come through no fault of his own.

Two of the trinity Jessica Hooper had named—loyalty and courage—he had certainly invoked. As for skill, what chance was there for showing it when one heavy male brute sat on a fellow's shoulders and another on his heels?

It was singular Peter Gomez had been unable to find any traces of the night's struggle. It might have happened, of course, that his assailants returned and, finding him departed, gathered up the gag and rope-ends which had bound him. Yet it seemed unlikely, for all they had desired was an opportunity to work damage to the power-boat without interference, after which they would naturally have departed secretly.

This was the line his thoughts followed as he put behind him the miles between Barratry and New Galilee. After an hour of rowing he shucked his flannel shirt, for the sun was up and slowly broiling him. Another hour, and he stopped for a breathing spell. Then he bent to his work again, dip and pull, dip and pull, with the monotonous regularity of an engine.

Three hours passed before he would permit himself to look over his shoulder. It was a longer jaunt than he had counted on, and he had departed a little from his course, although the port was in plain sight, riding, as it seemed, on the lip of its little harbor.

Another hour brought him ashore, with a freshening breeze to help against the tide, now in full ebb. He was so lucky as to find the man he sought nursing a contemplative pipe on the town dock.

"Sure he can have th' propeller," Captain Eb declared heartily after labored perusal of his old friend's note. "How're you goin' to get it acrost, though, I'd like t' know?"

"In the dory, of course," Jack explained. "That's the way I came."

"You mean to say you're goin' to take that row back again, with a head wind, after comin' twelve mile?" the old mariner exclaimed in vast surprise.

"That's the program," Jack replied.

"Well, by mighty. Shake, young feller. You've got grit, all right. Now come up to the house with me for a bite an' tell me how Cap'n Zed's gettin' along—and his gal, Jess."

Feeling that the rest would strengthen him for the return, Jack accepted the invitation. Captain Eb listened with deep interest to his tale of the depredations of the islanders.

"Takes spunk for a furriner to fish off Bar'try," he commented at the close. "But Cap'n Zed's got it. And Jess—my, that gal's solid spunk. So you're the young feller she fished up when she was goin' home last time? I heard tell about it."

It was hard to break away from the retired seaman's hospitality. Jack was bent on setting forth, however, as soon as possible, a variety of reasons dictating such a course. He wanted to get out of the harbor before the end of the ebb tide, the wind was freshening all the time, and at best it would take him one-half longer to return than it had to come.

He got under way, therefore, with many protestations of regret from Captain Eb that he was unable to commandeer a boat to set him across. Beyond the bar, catching the full force of the southwest wind, he quickly realized he had his work cut out.

His heart rose to meet the struggle as it had always risen in the twenty-four foot ring when he found an antagonist stronger than he had expected. One of the secrets of his prowess as a fighter had been that his courage was in proportion to the difficulty of his task. Encountering the head wind and the choppy sea it had kicked up, he found that it would call for the last ounce he could give the job to win back to Barratry.

He had abundant reason for fatigue. His labors had begun at three o'clock the morning before, more than thirty hours, as he now remembered. That period had included one full day's work hauling trap and performing the other duties of his life as a fisherman, a night's patrol, in the course of which he had been manhandled and imprisoned, and a twelve mile row across the open ocean.

All of which together constituted the reason why now, as he dug at the water, he felt a sinking of the heart. The waves slapped the sides of his dory, and the salt spray crusted his face. His hands opened in huge water blisters. New Galilee dwindled astern —dwindled and finally was lost in the haze, and Jack, tugging at his oars, gazed at the compass at his feet.

At last—at last he won. Every muscle in his body ached, but he had played the game. Rounding the point the welcome sight of the Hooper dock greeted him, and as he guided the dory's nose thither Herb Mann came down to meet him.

"By cripes, Jack, I didn't think you could do it," the number one man exclaimed. "I didn't, honest."

"Here's the propeller to show I did," Jack replied.

"I sh'd say as much! Anse—Harley—call Cap'n Zed. Here's Jack back from New Galilee."

The others came running to his call. Old Jim Tarkis waddled out with a jug of cold water, which was what Jack needed above everything. Last of all came Captain Zed and Jessica.

"Young feller, here's my hand," he said. "I told Herb you'd have your belly full by th' time you got t' New Galilee, if you got there 't all. An' here you be back again before four o'clock in th' aft'noon. If there's any Bar'try Islander can match that record I want to see him."

"I told grandfather he was wrong," Jessica came in. "I knew that if you set out to do it you would. And here's my hand."

If anything had been needed to add to Jack Garrett's satisfaction in his exploit—which, in truth, was quite as remarkable as the plaudits of his comrades indicated—it was the girl's expression of confidence. He took the little brown paw she offered, squeezed it gratefully, and retained it until her intimation that the proprieties had been satisfied.

"Buck Potter's been askin' around for his dory," said Peter Gomez, who had just added himself to the circle. "Now's a good time to take it back, because he's working around t'other side of th' harbor lookin'."

"Snake that propeller out, boys," Captain Zed ordered. "Easy, there—don't drop it over the side. Pete, you might 's well take the dory back where it b'longs. If Buck gives any trouble, holler."

"No, I'll take it back myself," said Jack determinedly. "I'm the one that borrowed it."

"Ain't you tuckered enough?" the captain demanded. "Let's see your hands. A livin' sight!" as Jack displayed his blistered palms. "Now some of th' other boys will take that dory—"

"I'll finish the job," Jack insisted. "Dory on the beach, oars under the fish-house — then I'll be ready for a mug-up and a nap."

As he drew up to the beach from which he had taken the dory a tall, heavy-shouldered man came to the water's edge and stood waiting for him. Jack recognized Buck Potter.

"What do you mean, runnin' off

with my boat without so much as askin' leave?" the Simcoxite welcomed him.

Jack beached the boat and jumped out before replying. Then, with the painter in his hand, he turned to face his inquisitor.

"I knew you wouldn't hesitate at a neighborly favor like that," he returned blandly. "Fact is, we needed a dory to use, and seeing this one idle we borrowed it."

"Borrowed it, did ye? You rented it—that's what you did!" roared Potter, who had worked himself into a passion. "And now, by cripes, I'm goin' to make you pay for it."

Buck Potter's reputation as a bully was so well known throughout Barratry that any other member of the Hooper gang than Jack would have anticipated his attack. That one of his mates, at least, had felt disinclined to take the chance of Buck's absence when Jack returned the dory, the latter gathered on seeing Herb Mann running toward him along the beach. He was still too far away, however, to render assistance.

"I'm willing to pay for it," Jack replied. "How much do you want?"

"You're going to pay for it with your hide, that's what," was the bully's rejoinder.

He interpreted his words by a rush at the young fisherman. Herb Mann, anxiously watching the interview as he pressed forward, saw Jack drop the dory's painter and leap backward.

CHAPTER XI.

A NIGHT MEETING.

"If I don't hurry up 'n' git there, Buck'll about half kill him," was the thought which flashed through Herb's mind. "And Jack just in from a twenty-four-mile pull an' out of bed for pretty nigh forty hours. He ain't more'n three-quarters as big as Buck, neither."

This was the channel his mind pursued as he plowed through the heavy sand. To his anxious eyes the menacing figure of the enraged fisherman towered over Jack Garrett like a Goliath over a David. He feared total annihilation before he could reach the scene.

That nothing less than severe bodily chastisement would satisfy the bully's mood was written clearly in his face. He was an unprepossessing man even in his most cheerful moments.

The nature of his employment had exaggerated the disproportion between his heavy shoulders and his legs. Arms like gnarled oak limbs terminated in immense, hairy hands, now clenched into fists. The snarl on his face disclosed the prominent yellow tusks which had contributed to the selection of his nickname.

He confidently expected the object of his wrath to seek safety in flight before he could reach him, which was the reason he advanced with the directness and lack of caution of a charging bull. It was quite outside of his calculations for this rather slender stripling to offer forceful resistance.

Herb Mann shared in this expectation. He guessed that Jack had observed his approach, and wondered why he did not hasten toward him for a juncture of forces.

"Why don't he run? Why don't he run?" was the question which repeated itself as he labored through the detaining sand. "Buck'll pound him to a jelly before I kin git there."

The last word had barely taken form in his mind before the clash came. Herb Mann stopped short in surprise, doubting his own eyes.

He had seen Buck Potter fairly on top of his fellow fisherman, reaching to grasp his clothing, the better to execute his amiable plan of punishment. Then, just at the instant when the smaller man appeared to have been pinned, he had leaped lightly aside.

His assailant's blind, charging weight carried him past his would-be victim. It all happened in the twinkling

of an eye, but Herb Mann's twinkling vision registered a stinging right planted behind Buck Potter's ear—as scientific and effective a blow as Jack had ever placed.

Goliath fell forward on his face with the dull, sickening effect of an ox hit by a pole-ax. Herb, caught short in his tracks and breathing heavily, experienced something of the sensations of a spectator at a moving-picture show. It was interesting, it amazed, but could it be true?

"Now he'll git him!" he murmured under his breath as Buck gathered himself stupidly together and struggled to his feet. "Why don't Jack jump on him? Why don't he crack him with a rock?"

He renewed his advance toward the scene of conflict. Instead of endeavoring to pin Potter to the earth while there was yet time, or looking for a suitable stone with which to initiate an attack on his skull, or even seizing the opportunity to depart hastily from the battle-ground, Jack Garrett remained where he was, awaiting with a sort of patient nonchalance his antagonist's recovery.

It was somewhat slow and uncertain. Buck Potter's intellectuality never scored a very high batting average, and just now stark astonishment clogged its operations.

The sight of Jack, cool and smiling, recalled him. Bellowing with rage, he essayed another rush.

This time Jack contented himself with merely dodging. When Buck had caught himself and turned again, he said with an irritating laugh:

"That's not the right way. We're not playing tag, you know. If you want to fight, keep cool and sail in."

Herb Mann had drawn close enough to catch the taunting remark. His fear of serious injury to his shipmate had undergone a change for the better. Being near enough to guarantee fair play, he contented himself with the rôle of innocent bystander.

A germ of doubt had taken root in Buck Potter's bosom. Having expected by now to be thoroughly enjoying himself marring the features of this uncharactered recruit to the forces of the fisherman he had sworn to drive from Barratry, as he had marred the features of his predecessor, Elmer Trask, it was discomfiting to find his desires thwarted. He changed his tactics.

"You let me come up to you an' I'll give you the wust hidin' you ever got," he promised.

"Stay where you are and I'll come to you," was Jack's remarkable retort. To Herb Mann's dismay, he advanced within the enemy's radius.

"Look out, Jack!" the number one man shouted.

It was breath needlessly expended. Buck Potter's small eyes twinkled with savage delight as he lunged at Jack. Had the blow landed it would have put a period to the afternoon's performance.

It failed of taking effect by Jack's lithe bending at the waist, and before Buck could recover he had accepted a double-hander, both blows marking his face.

Jack had decided that the arch-enemy of the Hooper gang needed a lesson he would remember. That would best be accomplished by giving him a few souvenirs to show his fellows. He proceeded to do so with earnestness and skill.

Inside of two minutes Buck Potter, the bully and putative champion of Barratry Island, was in a position to boast of a blackened eye, a bleeding nose, cut lips, and sundry minor abrasions which showed fiery-red against his coat of tan. All this was the fruit of processes too simple to be worth description.

Jack Garrett did the work with the grace and ease with come of long practise. It was a performance *con amore*, as the Italians have it. He closed the selection with a drive to the solar plexus which doubled Buck Potter up and sat him, gasping, on the beach.

"Tired?" asked Jack. "Want us to get you a chair?"

The prostrate man, his hands clasped across his stomach and blood issuing from his nasal organ, merely wheezed and sputtered. Jack turned to Herb Mann.

"I'm due for a bite to eat and a nap," he remarked. "This salt air makes me hungry."

Herb looked inquiringly at the fallen terror of the Simcox gang.

"He'll be all right," Jack assured him. "He didn't mean any harm — just playful. Weren't you, Buck?"

"Um-um!" Buck murmured.

"Come along, Herb. I'm dead sleepy," said Jack.

Herb Mann's recital of the encounter on the beach was received by Captain Zed's fishermen with many an expression of astonishment. It was a tradition of the island that Buck Potter was unbeatable. His swaggering, overbearing manner had contributed more to such a reputation than any actual achievement, for fishermen are by nature given to peace and minding their own business.

Buck Potter by his size, strength, and pugnacity had achieved a pedestal of his own from which it had been deemed impossible that he should be dislodged single-handed. Herb Mann's story, told while Jack was taking his well-earned rest, provoked unbelief.

"Why, I could lick Jack Garrett myself," asserted Anse Burdick. "He ain't got my heft, nor he ain't as tall and big across the shoulders. You're jokin', Herb."

"You ask Buck Potter if I'm jokin'," Herb retorted. "Better ask him over the beach phone, though. Likely he thinks it's a rough joke."

"You can't allus tell about these quiet-spoken fellers like Jack," Jim Tarkis put in. "I mind me th' time on th' old Sary Swann, whalin' out o' Fair Haven, the' was a green Vermonter on board 't had never been to sea before.

"Feller like this Buck Potter thought 'twas fun to be allus pickin' on him till one day th' Vermonter got his dander up an' he just took that there cuss acrost his knee an' spanked him plenty with a belayin'-pin, same as you'd spank a child, an' holdin' him all th' while with his left hand in his ha'r. T'other feller told what he was goin' to do t' him after 'twas all over, but I noticed he never done nothin' but leave him alone after that."

"Some o' these barge-hands —" Harley Whaley began. The number one man interrupted.

"I don't know 'bout Jack bein' a barge-hand," said he. "I never see a barge-hand could polish off Buck Potter th' way he done."

"Just th' same, 'twas in Jack's trick that they stole th' propeller off'n the work-boat," put in Peter Gomez, who until now had remained silent. "That story 'bout his havin' been shot at an' tied sounds fishy."

At that the conversation languished. Buck Potter was a known quantity, and Herb Mann's account of his downfall was acceptable and accepted. But Jack Garrett's story of his night adventure, lacking ocular proof, was less easy to swallow.

With the coming of July the big hotels at Oldham, three miles away, were filled for their short season. The advent of the "summer boarders," as they were known locally, was without effect on the lives of the fishermen. The latter, indeed, hardly knew of these additions to Barratry Island's population, except from reports of such as Harley Whaley, who was in the habit of visiting Oldham as often as his work permitted, and from seeing strangers who walked across the island, seeking the fisherman in his native haunts.

Longshore life held its current undisturbed. The fishing was neither good nor distinctly bad. The scup had wandered northward. The mackerel also were gone save for an occasional stray, but, making amends in

some degree, bluefish had "struck in," finding a ready market.

At Barratry, as in other places, there existed a working agreement among the fishermen with the object of maintaining prices by keeping the market from being flooded. Thus there was posted at the steamboat wharf every afternoon a notice of the number of barrels of fish each trap-owner should send out on the morrow.

The allotment was proportioned to net area. At the beginning of the season there had been an attempt to keep Captain Hooper from any participation whatever in the agreement. Objection had been overcome by his threat, seconded by the steamboat captain's—the latter not an islander—to send as much more than his rightful share every day as he could catch.

So Captain Zed had received a place along with Simcox, Whittle, and other avowed enemies. Longer-headed than they, now that fish were growing scarce, Captain Zed was filling his orders by drawing on his pound while the others fell under their allotment.

The pound was in essence a closed trap anchored in a safe place offshore. In it had been put the surplus of fish caught beyond the day's requirements. It was, in fact, a fish-bank, the owner's drafts on which were honored as long as the account held.

The rewards returned by this exhibition of thrift added envy to the other hostile sentiments entertained by the islanders against Captain Zed and his men. Nevertheless, for some time after the filching of the propeller and Jack Garrett's battle with Buck Potter—if that is a battle in which the punishment is received by only one party—peace reigned.

When his turn came around again Jack had been a little fearful of being made an exception to the general order. He sensed, although nothing had been said, a feeling of distrust of his history of what had happened the other night when the propeller had been stolen. Herb Mann's laconic reminder that he was sentinel for the night he accepted, therefore, with an unreasonable emotion of gratitude.

"Don't let 'em hand it to you again, Jack," Herb warned. "You know what Buck Potter's p'isen means."

"I'll know what to expect this time," Jack returned.

It was destined to be a more memorable night than he had figured on, however, for another reason than the Simcoxes or Whittleses. Having taken a turn through the already sleeping fishing hamlet to assure himself that everything was as it should be, he had found a seat on Captain Zed's dock, and was pensively watching the moon rise out of the ocean when, as a week earlier, he discovered Jessica Hooper at his side.

"I remembered it was your night," she acknowledged. "I'm a spotter. I came out to see that you were not asleep."

"Otherwise it would have been 'Shoot him at sunrise,' I suppose?"

"Of course," she said. "That's the only penalty that fits the crime. But, seriously, what I came for was to show you something."

With the words she placed in his hands a little bundle of what seemed raveling rope-ends. Jack turned them over in perplexity.

"Well?" he asked.

"Have you seen them before?"

"I don't know," he replied doubtfully. "If you found my initials worked into any of them—"

"Let me tell you," she interrupted. "Only yesterday grandfather told me the whole story of a week ago to-night—what you had told him about having been shot at and tied up. He talks over things with me to get my advice. He wanted to know whether I thought you should be put on patrol again. You know what I thought, because you are here.

"It was an odd story, though, as you must admit—odd that Peter Gomez failed to find any sign of your having been in the shanty. Grandfather said

he looked himself after you went to New Galilee, and I have been there, too. So this morning, while you were all out at the traps, I went over to help old Jim Tarkis, as I do sometimes.

"I took advantage of the occasion to go into the bunk-room, and this is what I found under Peter Gomez's blankets. It looks to me like the sort of thing a man might have been tied up with and gagged, as you said you were."

As nearly as Jack could make out in the horizontal light of the full moon, Jessica was right. She excused him from an opinion by adding:

"There's really no way to be certain, of course. My thought was that it was something to consider. Peter Gomez is an islander originally, you know."

"I didn't know," Jack returned. "But—I appreciate the trouble you've taken and—"

"Well?" she urged as he hesitated.

"You believe the story I told, don't you?"

"Of course I do," she replied heartily. "Now, let's talk of other matters."

Without having been uncomfortably aware of it, Jack had known nevertheless that his conduct on the night of the work-boat's disablement had remained open to suspicion.

As it was, Jessica's expression of confidence was heart-warming. He felt for her hand. It was given into his confidingly.

Emboldened, he bent closer. The spell of youth and the night was on them. She offered no resistance as, with a strong man's reverence for girlish purity, he kissed her cheek. The next moment, however, she had vanished, soundlessly as a wraith.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHADOW OF DOUBT.

SUNDAY was Captain Zed's day for posting up his books. It was the only time in the week when he was free from thoughts of the steamboat and city markets.

Perhaps it would be more accurate to say it was Jessica's day for posting, for the captain had a poor head for figures, and his twisted fingers were mostly thumbs when it came to handling a pencil. He sat looking over her shoulder while she twisted her pretty forehead into knots over the intricacies of mathematics.

"Four hunderd an' forty-two at three cents—how much is that, Jess?" he asked. She gave him the result.

"And ice and freight. They ain't much profit in it. Did you figger in th' ice?"

"Yes, grandfather."

"You go ahead with your cipherin' while I load my pipe," he ordered. "Seems if I could think better when I'm smokin'."

For one day in the week the fishing village cove was free from the put-put of gasoline engines and the shouts of men. A Sabbath calm enveloped everything.

The Hooper gang, having finished breakfast, was taking the air on a bench at the bunk-house door. Charlie Hinkley was rigging up some blackfish gear which he vaguely expected to sell to summer boarders, and the others were criticising the way he tied his knots.

"You got that sinker too fur above th' hook, Charlie," Anse Burdick commented.

"I ain't makin' this for suckers like you that want to take bait an' sinker both," rejoined Charlie, who was apt at repartee.

Turned on thus, Anse directed his attention to Harley Whaley, who had come out of the house and, with a hasty "Well, good-by, boys," started off in the direction of Oldham.

"Hey, Harl," he called.

"Well, what is it?"

"Be sure you come home with your wheels trackin'," Anse counseled.

Harley resumed his forward march with a muffled "Oh, you pshaw," while the comrades left behind remarked on the gorgeousness of his apparel. It was deserving of anything they might say. A suit of loud black and white checks enwrapped his chunky figure, the skin-tight trousers displaying in all their symmetry the knobs of his nether limbs. It was set off by a crimson tie and a heliotrope-bordered handkerchief leaning out of the breast-pocket. Bright yellow shoes and a skimming-dish hat completed a *tout ensemble* long to be remembered.

"Harl don't forget anything when he goes to see his girl, you bet," remarked Charlie. "I was a great feller for the girls when I was his age, too."

"I guess you ain't got over it none, Charlie," said Anse Burdick. "A little bird told me they's a widder—"

A big hand reached over and choked the remark by the simple process of jamming his ancient derby hat down over his face, and Herb Mann's voice remarked:

"Did you ever hear tell of the feller that got rich mindin' his own business, Anse?"

Rebuked, Anse smoothed his ruffled feathers and steered the conversation into safer channels.

The other absentees from the bench were Jim Tarkis, who was washing dishes and getting ready for dinner, and Jack Garrett. The latter strolled forth a few minutes after Harley's departure. He had not yet become so hardened to early rising that he turned out at three o'clock just for the fun of the thing when he did not have to.

He had just finished the coffee that Jim Tarkis had set on the back of the stove for him, and felt like a walk. His invitation was refused by the others.

"If you meet up with Buck Potter, bring me home a piece of him for a souvenir, Jack," Herb Mann sent after him. Jack generously agreed to remember the request.

About the time he passed Captain Zed's window Jessica was finishing her job of bookkeeping.

"It hasn't been such a very good week, grandfather," she remarked, passing the balance-sheet over.

"I knew 'twan't," he said as he took the slip. "I'm out of pocket on th' hull season, and th' best of it over already. That business of the gill net set me back just enough to make th' difference between profit an' loss."

"Don't you care, grandfather," Jess encouraged him. "You've done as well as the others, haven't you?"

"Yes and no. Simcox and George Whittle and th' rest are fishin' straight shares. I had to promise th' men ten dollars a week apiece to get 'em to come at all, and a good deal of th' time had to dig to pay it."

"The season isn't over yet," she reminded him. "You might make a big catch that would make everything all right."

"That's so. I try not to get downhearted, Jess. I've known men that made their everlastin' fortunes in a single haul. Rufe Gilbert walkin' along th' beach picked up a chunk of ambergree big as your head, and kep' drunk for two years steady without doin' a stroke of work. That's what makes men go fishin', I suppose—th' off-chance that somethin' big like that'll happen to them."

"It's bound to happen, grandfather," the girl said. "Perhaps this very day. Who knows?"

He leaned over and put his hand fondly on her shoulder.

"You're a great help to your old grandfather, Jess," he said. "I don't know what I'd ever do without you."

"You won't have to do without me," she said, patting his gnarled hand with her slender brown one. "I'm a hard person to get rid of."

"That reminds me," he returned. "I sh'ld have spoken of it before. There's that feller, Jack Garrett. Don't let yourself be thinkin' too much about him, Jess, will you?"

"Why, grandfather, what do you mean?" she exclaimed, with perfectly sincere astonishment. "What makes you say that?"

"I've seen him and you together a few times," he explained, "and I didn't know. He's young, like you, and I've noticed mostly that young folks are sympathetic with each other. I just wanted to tell you to look out for yourself."

"But suppose—just suppose—I did think a good deal about him, grandfather? Why shouldn't I, or any girl? Isn't he all right?"

"That's just th' point, Jess. We don't know. Fact is, we don't know anything 't all about him exceptin' that you picked him out o' the water and saved his life. He's a pretty good fisherman, and he seems stiddy.

"But our folks, Jess, have lived around here for two hunderd years 'n more. Not that we're any better 'count o' that, but anybody that wants to can find out all about us. You see what I'm drivin' at?"

"You mean that if a girl was inclined to like a man she ought to investigate him. Is that it?"

"That's a good deal it, Jess," he agreed. "If a woman could live with a man a year b'fore she married him she'd put off marryin' him a good many more times than she does now, and cheat th' divorce courts."

"Why, grandfather, you shock me!" cried Jessica, rising. "The idea of putting such thoughts in the head of a young person like myself. I'm going for a walk, and when I come back I hope to find you less depraved."

She snatched her straw hat from its hook and slipped out of the door, leaving the old man chuckling.

As may have been deduced from the first introduction, Jessica Hooper was a girl who knew her own mind, and was willing to act on her own judgment. Her desire to take a walk had developed from the sight of Jack Garrett passing the house.

The astute reader may make another deduction. For Jessica was not a girl to throw herself in a young man's path without adequate excuse.

The acquaintance between them begun in circumstances so sensational had ripened. Not yet had it arrived at the fruit of an engagement, or even of an understanding.

But since that night on the fish-dock—the night when she had permitted Jack to leap the barrier and pass beyond the conventional limit—both had been aware of the existence of that tenuous bond which time and proximity strengthen. Words of love had been held back. Jack was sensible of his social inferiority as an unvouched for and penniless member of Captain Zed's gang of fishermen. His pride forbade that he should come to her as a loser, and thus far he remained within that category.

All these facts the girl understood as well as he did. Her feminine intuition sensed the reasons for his reluctance, and her strong instinct for initiative led her to rebel against the barrier.

Now, not having had a conversation with him for several days, she proposed to indulge herself. Unless he had gone farther than his strolling threatened, she would overtake him on the road along the cliffs. It was the only path he could have followed, for the fisherman's cove was the terminus of the road leading from Oldham.

The sea sparkled in the sunshine; the long, lazy rollers spent themselves on the shore, and song-sparrows made merry in the hedgerows. It was a morning all planned for lovers' meetings.

She stopped briefly where the way led across the marsh to gather an armful of mallows, long-stemmed and tropically pink. A red-winged blackbird teetered and crackled on a sumac bough, angry at her near approach. She laughed and drove him away with a snap of her finger.

Beyond the marsh the road rose to

the cliffs. Jessica loitered on the slope, questioning whether what she was doing was unmaidenly. But doubt was short-lived on such a day as this, so she held her course.

From the summit of the hill Barratry's most magnificent view of the ocean is obtained. The air was so clear she could look across to New Galilee, twelve miles distant, and wonder what her old friends were doing. Amy Harms, her bosom chum, would be in the choir loft of the Baptist Church at this hour. Captain Eb would be adorning a pew well down front, uncomfortable in black coat and choker of an earlier style. Jessica felt well satisfied to be passing the morning in the open.

On the far horizon rose a tugboat's oily smoke. The girl's keen eye could dimly make out the following tow. To the southward three or four white sails flashed of pleasure craft, she judged.

Then, having satisfied the conventions of a shore dweller by taking note of everything in sight, she resumed her walk, presently arriving at the corner where the highway makes an abrupt turn to the right and cuts across the island. An ancient stone wall overgrown with wild clematis and blackberry creepers shut off the view.

As yet she had encountered no sign of Jack, and had begun to wonder whether he had held on to Oldham. Now, rounding the corner, she saw him.

The road, dipping, ran straight for a quarter of a mile. Three-quarters of the way down this perspective was the young man she had set out to join.

Just at first she was unable to make out what he was doing. He stood at the edge of the road with his eyes fixed on something on the ground. An instant later, her vision clearing, she saw that it was a girl.

Without meaning to act the part of spy, Jessica remained for the time studying the scene. The first thought to flash across her was that the girl was some stranger who had hurt herself. Certainly her attitude indicated as much.

She was seated on a rock at the roadside, with her face buried in her hands. It appeared that she had been or was crying.

Jessica suffered an impulse to hasten to her aid. It was stifled by seeing the girl lift her head, rise to her feet, and grasp Jack Garrett's arm, while she engaged him in animated conversation.

This gave her an opportunity to see what sort of girl it was that had broken in on her Sunday morning plans. She was brightly, not to say daringly, gowned. Her dress was cut low at the neck and restricted to the point of absurdity at the skirt. She was gloved in white, and Jessica Hooper knew without being close enough to see that she wore high-heeled shoes.

Who could it be? What was Jack Garrett's relation to her? Was it true, as her grandfather had told her only a few minutes earlier, that a man must not be taken at his face value?

She stood a moment longer looking on the scene three-quarters of the way down the quiet lane, while she propounded these questions. The strange girl continued to pour forth her story, looking up into Jack's face in an intimate way. Then she buried her face on the young man's arm, which she still held, and the last glimpse Jessica caught as she withdrew softly was of the youth putting his arms protectingly around her.

CHAPTER XIII.

FAMILIAR FACES.

Jack Garrett's idea when he set forth that Sabbath morning had been to indulge in a quiet stroll and some self-communion apart from the distracting influence of his fellow fishermen.

Common courtesy had inspired him

to invite company. He knew himself perfectly safe in so doing, the seaman's antipathy to unnecessary use of his legs being notorious. Having satisfied his conscience on that score, he walked leisurely through the village, across the causeway, and up the hill, where he sat for a few minutes apparently intent on the wide-spread scene, but actually deep in consideration of vitally important personal questions.

One so little given as the erstwhile pugilist to introspection must needs have had some compelling motive. His whole life had been devoted to the practise of leaping before he looked. That the present impulse to look first grew out of consideration for another spoke eloquently for the influence of Jessica Hooper.

His previous affairs of the heart, like that with the show-girl in "Bon Voyage," had been headlong plunges. As he recalled the intensity of the flame for Vesta Dawn which had consumed him he laughed aloud. But there was bitterness in his voice.

He had thought he knew what love meant. Now he realized he never had known. Not indulgence, but service, sacrifice, unselfishness — this much Jessica Hooper had taught him.

He loved her. Not because of the lesson, nor even in spite of it, but perhaps because the imparting of such instruction was of her nature. He tried vainly to trace the germination of a love which he well knew would last as long as life.

Was it when she had come to him over the howling waters, saving his life at risk of her own? Was it lately, when she had yielded her hand to his so confidingly? It was an unanswerable question as well as beside the point.

The important thing to consider was what he should do about it. Herein was betrayed the difference between the Jack Garrett of now and him of a few weeks earlier. As to where the credit belonged for the evolution, that is outside of the story.

The one conclusion arrived at directly was that in his existing circumstances he had not the right to tell her of his love. Unable to offer her a name to be proud of and the assurances a girl may reasonably expect of a man, he must either reestablish himself or keep silent.

Worse than nameless, he lived under an assumed name which had been smirched by defeat. It was the memory of the knockout administered by Butch Horlock which rankled worst. Even though it had been accomplished, as he felt certain yet could not prove, by treacherous conspiracy, he recognized his own contributory part. But for that he could approach Jessica with self-respect, even if with empty hands.

As it was, he saw that he must halt where he stood until he could retrieve. This was to be accomplished — how? Two paths opened.

One was to seek reconciliation with the uncle, his guardian and benefactor, whose wishes he had flouted and whose very existence he had ignored since his dismissal from college. It would be neither an agreeable nor a graceful task to attempt the renewal of old relations with Lawrence Follansby.

In his enlarged vision he saw that his uncle's single aim had been to develop Jack into a credit to the old family name. Full many a college scrape had been forgiven before the ultimatum. When dismissed from academic halls Jack had felt convinced of the folly of trying to renew the family tie.

Nevertheless, it was conceivable that, playing the part of prodigal nephew, with full confession, he might be taken back. Even in his riper experience, however, the rôle of prodigal was distasteful.

He might return to the prize ring. There must be managers aplenty who would be glad to look after his interests. Then he could fight his way back to his former standing and retire with honor instead of in disgrace.

Yes, that was the course of wisdom. He could come back quickly. The life-giving air of the sea, the hard work, and abundant fare had made him a better man than ever he had been in the old days, even when rigidly training. He flexed his muscles proudly, conscious of his strength.

Another thought supervened. To leave Barratry and resume his former occupation at once would be unfair to Captain Zed and his mates. He must quit his present job a winner before seeking another. The fishing season would carry into mid-autumn.

Then, when the traps were taken out and Captain Zed returned to New Galilee, he himself would hunt up a manager and regain his withered laurels. After that he could offer himself to Jessica, with full hands and a re-established name, tell her the whole story, and ask for her love.

Having reached his decision, he arose and continued his stroll. In deference to Captain Zed's wishes, the gang save Harley Whaley kept fairly close to their own quarters the better to avoid clashes with the enemy. A special dispensation was made in Harley's case because of his deep-seated taste for love-making.

It happened, therefore, that Jack had never explored Barratry beyond the fishing village. He walked slowly, studying his surroundings with whatever interest they deserved, all his thoughts set against the background of Jessica.

That was a picturesque old stone wall with the vines trailing over it—and she was fond of flowers. All nice girls liked flowers, and as she was the nicest of all nice girls she must be particularly fond of them. What a view of the ocean this headland gave! And her slender, boyish figure would fit admirably into the scene.

So his rudderless reflections ran until, having rounded the corner and progressed some distance down the quarter-mile decline, he was brought to a sudden pause by the sight of a girl, who was quite obviously not Jessica, seated on a stone by the roadside, her face buried in her hands.

She had not heard Jack's approach. The spot where she sat was perhaps a mile from Oldham, where the big hotels were. He wondered why a young woman so distinctly of the summer-boarder class had come so far afield at this hour of the morning.

An instant later, catching the sound of his footfall, she raised her face. The two stared at one another wordlessly for the space of a deep breath.

Jack was first to recover from his surprise. He had halted, but now made as if to move on without remark. The girl forbade.

"Jack Garrett!" she cried.

He stopped again and gazed at her wonderingly. It was plain enough she had been crying. The tears stood in her eyes even yet, and had channeled lines through her complexion.

The time had been, and that not long before, when the mere sight of the young woman so unexpectedly encountered would have given Jack Garrett's pulses a throb. Yet it was without surprise he found himself insensible at the present moment to the appeal of her pretty, small-featured face and languorous eyes. He viewed these once potent charms as dispassionately as he would have contemplated a dead fish.

What her armament failed to accomplish, however, the spectacle of her distress did. He replied:

"Is there anything I can do for you, Vesta?"

It was at this point in their interview that Jessica, strolling in Jack's wake, rounded the corner of the stone wall.

"Jack," the girl repeated, "how did you come here?"

"Never mind that," he answered. "It is stranger to me to find you here. You seem in trouble. If I can help—"

The note of sympathy had unconsciously crept into his voice. Perhaps it was that which brought Vesta to

her feet. At any rate, she arose, grasped his arm in her two hands, and with her face against his breast burst into a fresh fit of weeping.

Jack did what any man might have done in such a case. The spectacle of a pretty woman in tears is moving. His free arm crept around her shoulders, which he patted consolingly.

"There — there — Vesta," he said. "Never mind."

Jessica retreated softly, leaving the scene without witnesses.

For a minute the sobbing girl was unable to speak. At last she said in muffled tones, her face still hidden:

"You can't help. Nobody can help."

"But how did you come here, Vesta?" Jack insisted. "Come, brace up. It can't be as bad as you think. Stop crying and tell me what the trouble is. How do you happen to be on Barratry?"

After a little struggle, she regained her self-control sufficiently to lift her head and reply:

"How do I happen to be on Barratry?" she repeated. "I came because Butch was here."

"Butch Horlock?" It was Jack's turn to express surprise.

The girl nodded.

"Butch Horlock on Barratry?" the young man said again. "Why, what is he doing here? And if he is, and you wanted to be with him, what are you crying about? I don't see."

On the point of breaking down again, the girl braced up, bursting instead into vehement explanation.

"Oh, Jack!" she cried; "Butch has treated me bad. I've done everything for him a girl can. He promised to marry me. He ought to marry me, Jack, and now he won't. He says he's too busy."

Here, at length, was a tangible something on which to base a talk. Jack disengaged himself from the girl and motioned to the rock on which she had been seated when he met her.

"Let's sit down here and talk it over, Vesta," he suggested. "I don't understand the matter at all. What in the world is Butch doing on Barratry, and why is he too busy to marry you, and—"

So many questions suggested themselves that he found difficulty in framing them all. Vesta suffered herself to be seated beside the road and began the explanation.

"You know I'm not the crying sort, Jack. It makes me ashamed for you to find me so. And you're the last person I expected to see here. Where did you go? There were all sorts of stories. And those funny clothes you're wearing—"

"Never mind that, Vesta," Jack interrupted. "If you want to know, I'm a fisherman here on Barratry. What's this about Butch? Why is he here?"

"Oh, didn't you know he was matched to fight Monk Reilly in August? Sure. Sam Levine's handling him, and they've come to Barratry Island for training. It's a secret, though. Sam thought he'd keep him here until about two weeks before the fight."

"So that's it?" Jack exclaimed. The light broke suddenly. Butch Horlock, then, was the great unnamed signed for the fight with the champion. An envious pang wrenched him. This fight would have been his but for the fiasco of his last appearance.

"You must have heard about the fight," Vesta went on. "The biggest one this year? Butch is sure to win."

"Nobody's sure to win till the fight's over," Jack returned out of the bitterness of experience. "I thought I was sure to win the time I went against the Butcher—but I didn't."

Vesta winced as from a blow, and the young man half repented his thrust. He turned the conversation into its previous channel.

"But what is your trouble, Vesta?" he asked. "You say you came here because Horlock is on the island, and that he has promised to marry you. What more do you want?"

"I told you, Jack," she answered in a small voice. "He says he won't marry me anyway until after the fight, and—and—"

Studying her more sharply, the truth broke on him.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "And why won't he marry you?"

"He's been off and on with me ever since the night he whipped you, Jack," she said. "Now 'twas one thing, and now the other. And—I love him."

"Well, he loves you, too, doesn't he?"

"I'm sure he does. Oh, yes, he loves me. But Butch got the swelled head from knocking you out, and afterward worse when Sam Levine took him on."

Jack understood. The malady named is epidemic in ring circles. Bit by bit she told him the rest of her story.

Vesta was in love with Horlock as deeply as her nature permitted. The proofs of affection she had given amply attested that. She remained convinced, also, that Butch Horlock loved her.

His defeat of Jack Garrett, however, had led him to flights of ambition hitherto unentertained. The date for the wedding had been set, and put off on the ground that the fighter could not break into his training. The same excuse had been made when Horlock was preparing for the fight between Jack Garrett and himself. Besides, there was then—

"Yes, yes, go on," Jack urged. "He wanted to make sure of that fight, didn't he?"

"It was a dirty business, Jack," the girl admitted. "I wouldn't have had a hand in it only Butch threatened—"

"I understand. So you slipped a little dope into me?"

The girl's lips compressed into silence.

"Well, if the Butcher is willing to marry you after the championship fight, won't that be good enough?" Jack asked.

"But I know him so well," said Vesta. "If he wins, his head will be swelled worse than ever. If he loses, he will marry me."

"Why if he loses, in Heaven's name?"

"Because men are that way," the worldly-wise girl replied. "If they lose they want somebody to sympathize. They're grateful then. But if they're successful they think it's all their own doing, and they're too important to remember old friends."

The young man was unable to avoid a part at least of the conclusion. His last meeting with Vesta Dawn had been born of a loser's desire for sympathy. He shifted the line of conversation.

"Where is the training headquarters, Vesta?" he inquired.

She mentioned a farmhouse near the shore whose location Jack knew in a general way.

"If there was anything I could do—" he began.

"There isn't, Jack. There's nothing any one can do. Butch won't marry me until after the fight anyway—he says so. And Sam Levine's holding him to training with a clause that he can put somebody else against Monk Reilly at the last minute if he wants to. He told Butch he wouldn't have the same trick played on him twice."

The young man shrank a little from the cut. The temptation to parry was irresistible.

"Suppose somebody plays the trick on Butch he played on me?" said he. "It was dope, wasn't it, Vesta? And you know Sam Levine's a square man. What if I took the story to him."

"Oh!" The girl's face revealed that she saw the logic of the suggestion. "But Sam's a business man," she added. "He wouldn't throw up a chance to make money just for that, I'm sure."

"You don't know Sam as I do," was his reply. "He likes money, but he wouldn't accept it by associating with a crook."

Vesta flared into sudden anger.

"He's not a crook," she protested. "He's the best man in the world some ways, and I—I love him. Well, I better be getting back to the hotel for dinner."

He offered to accompany her, but she refused. He was uncertain whether it was because his company was distasteful or because she feared to encounter Horlock. So he stood watching her out of sight and, turning, slowly retraced his steps.

It was an ugly tangle, he reflected, and little good as he owed Vesta he wished he could help her. He wished he might encounter Horlock again in his present condition, to give him what he deserved.

Suppose he went to Sam Levine and offered to demonstrate that he was the fitter man to face the champion? That was absurd, however. The articles were signed, the date set, and Vesta must take her chances on Butch's victory or defeat.

Nor could he share her confidence that his one-time rival would return to her even if beaten. Vesta might have sized up one side of his character, but she was evidently ignorant of his reputation where other women were concerned.

He was destined to have ocular demonstration of the justice of this reputation far sooner than he might have anticipated. He had gone along the road head down, revolving the facts which had been brought to his attention, and was recalled to consciousness of his surroundings by the sound of scuffling feet. Looking up, he saw a man and woman struggling.

The man was apparently trying to kiss the girl, who was offering silent but stubborn resistance. At least, that was the impression Jack received. It was his day, evidently, for interfering in the affairs of other people.

Then it flashed on him that this was very much his affair. For he had recognized in the struggling girl Jessica Hooper. The figure of the man was familiar also. Surely it was that of his old enemy, Butch Horlock.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN INTERRUPTED BATTLE.

Butch Horlock it was, in training gear—gray sweater, flannel trousers, running shoes and the rest. His amorous advances appeared not to have smothered his sense of caution, for he saw Jack the instant the latter came into view.

He and Jessica fell apart, and the Butcher gave back a couple of paces. When Jack, who had sprung forward like an arrow released from the bow, came within striking distance, the girl, panting, flushed with wrath, and becomingly disheveled, but unafraid, was trying to command her powers of expression. Sheer anger stifled utterance.

"You—you—" was all she could say at first.

"What is the meaning of this?" cried Jack, turning from one to the other.

"This — this creature," returned Jessica denouncingly, "came into the road below here from the beach. I was on my way home. He stopped to ask his way and held me in talk. Then he—he tried—tried to—"

"I know," Jack stopped her. "What have you got to say for yourself, Butch Horlock? Talk fast, for you are going to get the worst beating you ever got in your life."

Until he heard his name the other man appeared not to have recognized the person who had come between him and his desires. Now, looking more sharply, he saw who it was.

"What are you buttin' in for?" he demanded. "Where'd you come from, anyway? I t'ought you'd gone back to th' navy to find somebody you kin lick."

With the approach of the moment of conflict the fierce passion for immediate punishment which had blazed up

when he came to an understanding of the insult offered Jessica Hooper congealed into cold decision. Jack could have laughed in pure delight at the opportunity which had come of avenging his old grievance and this fresher one.

His calmer mood urged that he drain the cup deliberately to taste its fullest fragrance. Butch Horlock would not, must not, deny him this much.

"Jessica"—he turned to her—"this—er—person and I have a little matter of business to transact. You will return to your home so that we may be free to discuss it."

"Can th' ten-twent'-thirt' stuff!" said Horlock jeeringly. "You was always too good for th' game. If you want to have yer block knocked off, say so in plain United States."

Jack, without paying attention to this sally, was waiting patiently for the girl's departure. She stood looking at him coldly, one hand raised to the adjustment of her hair.

"Well!" he exclaimed.

She stood gazing at him a moment longer. Afterward, when he had more leisure for reflection, he tried to recall her expression and analyze it. It was quite unlike anything he had seen on her face hitherto.

Then, deliberately, and as he felt rather than thought with her mind on something other than the existing situation, she turned on her heel. He stood watching her until she had nearly reached the foot of the hill. Butch Horlock's impatient voice recalled him.

"Do you want anyt'ing out o' me?" he demanded. "If you do, say so. If not—"

"You must pardon me, Mr. Butch Horlock," said Jack with exaggerated courtesy. "I certainly do want something out of you, as you put it. You are, it seems, a gay cavalier. I have a score to settle with you on that ground and on another."

"Wh—what's eatin' you?" Butch asked in real bewilderment.

"To name only one of the things," Jack replied, "you knocked me out once. You haven't forgotten?"

"And I kin do it again, any time and any place," the Butcher averred confidently. "For money or—"

"You knocked me out once," Jack interrupted, "but you had to dope me to accomplish it. I still owe you for that drugging. Shall we settle it here or cross the fence to softer turf?"

Butch Horlock must receive the credit of not being afraid. This was the more noteworthy because he was consciously caught in wrongdoing, a fact which of itself might have weakened his pugnacity. He expressed himself, nevertheless, perfectly willing to accommodate his challenger.

"Since you leave it to me, then," said Jack courteously, "let us cross the wall and pick out a suitable spot. Not that I expect it to take much time, but we shall be more secure from interruption."

"Say, you know you ain't in my class no more!" the Butcher exclaimed. "I'll make you look like a last year's scarecrow."

"That remains to be seen," Jack replied. "It is my firm conviction that in a quarter of an hour at the outside you will be crying for help. Come!"

He led the way, enjoying the prospect to the utmost and bent on drawing out its delights. What pleasure to give his manhood this test, to summon to his aid again the skill he once had possessed! And, above all, to employ it in such a cause as his, on such a foeman!

He was so careful to select a spot of equal advantages to both that the Butcher became suspicious of his honesty.

"Say, what sort of a game is dis?" he asked. "I t'ink you're stallin' like you did th' last time. I'll break that pretty face of yours this trip."

"Don't make any promises you can't keep, Butch," Jack advised. "Here, how will this do? The grass is long enough for you to fall on without being

hurt, and there are no rocks to crack your thick skull on. Now"—his voice became savage—"strip."

With every indication of willingness, Butch Horlock threw his cap aside and began to peel off his sweater. The look of incredulity with which he had received Jack's first invitation altered to one of doubt.

"Do you t'ink you can stand up wid me?" he asked. "Why, you big hunk o' putty, I'll muss you all out o' shape. What's it all about, anyway?"

"You remember the last fight and what preceded it, Butch?" Jack asked gently. "Then there's a blow you handed me on Broadway and got away with. We'll cast up our ac—"

His promise stopped uncompleted. Over Horlock's shoulder by some trick of vision he had caught sight of a phenomenon out there on the quiet face of the sea which drew him out of himself.

The Butcher swung nervously to look behind.

"What is it?" he asked.

Jack made no reply, but continued staring, fixed as a statue, with one coat-sleeve half off.

"Come on. I'm all ready," Horlock urged.

Still Jack remained at gaze. That which he saw amply accounted for his sudden abstraction.

A half-mile offshore, it may have been, the glassy surface of the water had been broken by a sudden disturbance born from below. It was like the patter of rain-drops on a mill-pond, with the difference that the area of the phenomenon was strictly limited.

From where Jack stood it was impossible to tell how much territory was included in the field of the disturbance. It might have been one acre or five.

But the sight had broken in on his anticipated pleasure. For that breaking of the water was caused, as he knew, by mackerel—an immense school of mackerel; more than all, mackerel out of season, when they commanded a price. Duty urged him to summon the gang and make a try for the school without an instant's delay.

At any moment somebody else who understood might see and set forth in pursuit. Should he run and tell Captain Zed? Or should he remain here and fight?

In an inconceivably brief space Jack had fought it out with himself and won a great victory. It all came to pass between the time of slipping his coat half off and slipping it back again. Without a word he bolted, leaped the stone wall, and tore down the road.

His old rival stood a minute looking bewilderedly after the fleeing figure. Little by little a grin overspread his face.

"Th' big stiff!" he murmured caressingly. "Th' mutt! I allus said he had a streak of yellow big enough for an ottermobile race, and dis proves it. If I meet up wid him agin—"

Jack reached the fishing village without seeing Jessica. This was explained by the fact that, having gained the foot of the hill, she had shrunk back into the shrubbery to have a quiet little cry before rejoining her grandfather. Shattered faith complicating the growing pains of love operates to the production of such demonstrations.

Buck Potter and other members of the Simcox gang, loafing around their bunk-house, saw his haste and wondered. Buck went around the corner of the house to follow his flight and, returning, announced his conviction that something was up. Straightway, as by unanimous consent, the whole force adjourned to the harbor front.

Captain Zed sat in his sunlit combination of kitchen, dining and living-room, smoking and worrying up a headache over Jessica's balance-sheets, when Jack burst in on him. He took out his pipe and looked up in surprise at the youth's unconventional entry.

"Mackerel!" Jack cried.

"Mackerel? What d'you mean?"

"A big school of them—half a mile off Bleeson Point. I saw them from the cliff."

"Get the men." Captain Zed was alert on the instant. "I'll meet you down by the dories. Look alive now."

The final admonition was unnecessary, for Jack was on his way already. He repeated his message to Herb Mann and the rest.

"Here, Charlie, you an' Anse run to th' fish-house and get th' big seine on th' dock!" Herb shouted, without waiting to offer comment on the proclamation. "Jim, you're in on this. Go along with Charlie. Jack, Pete, you come with me. We'll help cap'n get his dories out and th' work-boat started. No time to waste."

They did allow themselves long enough to snatch oilskins, for they were dressed in their best clothes in honor of the holiday; but in easily less than sixty seconds after Jack's irruption they were on their way to the various posts. Jack, keeping along with Herb's long legs, was describing what he had seen.

"Mighty queer," Herb rejoined. "It's too late for mackerel to be workin' north and too early for 'em to be comin' back. But I've heard of them bein' caught in this month."

Captain Zed was waiting for his men at the water's edge, and already had one dory afloat. The other was shoved off, the work-boat's engine starting, and they rounded up to the fish-house dock in a long curve to take on the rest of the men.

The big black seine was piled into one of the dories. Buck Potter and his mates, closely watching the maneuvers, opened their eyes wide at this sight.

"Now what do you make out o' that, Buck?" exclaimed one of his mates.

"We'll see," Buck replied. "'T looks like fishin' on Sundays. If they can go seinin' I guess we can. Look sharp here, boys."

Straightway the Simcoxes duplicated the operations of the Hoopers, even to the length of loading their own seine into a dory. The speed with which they worked may be inferred from the fact that they were not three minutes behind the others in rounding the point for the open sea.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BIG HAUL.

THE Hooper gang was full of speculation and doubt as soon as their first rush was over.

"I'll bet it was a school of buckies you saw, Jack," ventured Anse Burdick. "Fishin' out o' Glo'ster, I've had many a pull for nothin' but a school of buckies."

"Maybe it was," Jack replied. "It's up to the captain whether or not it's worth while trying to find out."

Buckies are the despised menhaden, utilized only for oil and fertilizer. But Captain Zed was of the opinion that no mistake was being made in investigating.

"If it's buckies, all it's cost us is a little time an' gasoline," said he. "And if it's mackerel, like Jack says, and they don't sound before we can get th' old seine under them, it'll help pay us for a poor season."

"But mackerel ain't runnin' now," Anse persisted. "'Tain't reasonable these sh'ld be mackerel. Why, they're fetchin' sixty cents apiece retail in N'York."

This light on the possibilities of what he had seen rather staggered Jack. He asked how much that might mean wholesale.

"Twenty cents on th' steamboat wharf—not a cent less, prob'ly more," said Herb Mann. "That's fresh an' big ones. Salted down, not so much."

The counting of the loot before the fish were netted was broken in on by the put-put of another motor-boat, which revealed itself to be that of the Simcox crew just rounding into sight.

"Now what do you suppose they're after?" inquired Captain Zed. "I saw th' whole lot of 'em loafin' around th' harbor head when I put th' dory over. They didn't look then as if they

had any very important bus'ness on hand. Do you reckon they've smelled them mackerel?"

"More likely they smelled us," Herb Mann growled. "They seen there was somethin' up and wanted to come in on it, I wouldn't be s'prised."

All hands looked anxiously to see which way the Simcox boat headed after quitting the harbor. It came about and trailed unashamed in the wake of the leader.

"Sufferin' porpoises, if they ain't got a seine aboard too!" exclaimed Captain Zed. "Yet they couldn't 'a' seen them mackerel."

"Give her all th' gas she'll take, cap'n," the number one man advised. "This old tub ain't so very speedy, but we've got a little start an' p'raps we kin shake 'em."

It was at best a travesty of a race. Even unimpeded by its dories and carrying less weight than a full crew, either boat would have been embarrassed if called on to do six knots an hour. Considering the possible stakes involved, however, it was an event of consequence.

Jack Garrett was the only man aboard without personal experience of one of the fishermen's biggest gambles. All of the others had run the gamut of elation and disappointment attendant on the pursuit of this important article of sea-food.

He knew something about it, however, from overhearing the reminiscences of his companions in yarn-telling hours. If it should prove to be a school of mackerel he had seen—and as had been pointed out forcibly, the chances were all against it at this season—and they fell to the seine the profits of a single haul might be greater than an entire season's trap-fishing.

Right here on Barratry one catch had been made worth thirty thousand dollars. And at that it had been necessary to pickle the fish. Could they have been taken into market fresh it would have meant even more money.

It was small wonder, therefore, that the eyes of the men glittered with excitement as they neared the spot where Jack had seen fish. There was a year's earnings for every man in success.

Captain Zed took the wheel, while Herb Mann and Jack stood up in the bow, the former to search for signs and the latter to indicate where he had seen the school.

The Simcox boat still hung astern, its position having changed little with respect to the leader. Its crew was only too clearly playing a game of follow the leader, although the tall figure of Buck Potter was perched on the thwarts, with an advantage of a few inches as lookout over anybody among the Hoopers.

"Now where was it, Jack?" Herb inquired. "Here's Bleeson Point."

"Right over there," Jack pointed. "They broke water—I was up on the top of the cliff, and I didn't wait to see which way they might be heading. Perhaps I should have."

"You done just right," Herb commended. "They haven't got far away yet. Throw her over a leetle to starboard, cap'n."

The boat veered to the direction Herb's finger indicated.

"Now slow her down—there, that's about right. Charlie, you stick right by th' engin' in case she needs any lookin' after. Be ready to sock th' gasoline to her any minute. Hold her there."

Mackerel-fishing presents all the thrills of any fishing, with a few of its own. A school comes to the surface with a rush in pursuit of whatever it feeds on, then drops out of sight, and may not be seen again for an hour. Or it may make a succession of rushes, excited by abundance of some favorite article of diet, in which case it falls easy prey.

In the former event, however, it tries the patience. The fisherman knows that the mackerel are only a few feet below the surface, perhaps

within a biscuit throw, or possibly miles away and widening the gap. The uncertainty is sporting, but nerve-racking when it involves one's living.

At night conditions are better. The mackerel schooners which, sailing out of Gloucester, supply the market with the great bulk of this kind of food, cruise from dusk to dawn up and down the mackerel grounds, with a lookout at the masthead, and all of the crew except those needed to sail the vessel trailing aft in the dories so that not a second may be lost.

The fish then discover themselves by stirring up the phosphorescence in the water as they break the surface. A night when the sea "fires" is suitable to mackereling.

Any lingering doubt as to the motives of the Simcoxes was dissipated by the sleuthhound way in which they hung in the wake of the Hooper boat. Perhaps a half-mile separated the two, and thus far the pursuers had shown no inclination to close the gap.

They had fallen a little farther behind when, in response to Herb Mann's urging, the Hooper boat had put on full speed. This was encouraging as it revealed the Simcox craft, a converted cat, a shade the slower.

When the leader had altered its course the other had shifted as well. Now it was cutting a parallel. The outcome hung on the direction the fish Jack had seen were taking—if toward the mouth of the harbor, the advantage might easily fall to the Simcoxes, or if along the line of the cliffs to the Hoopers.

Under Herb's leadership a long zigzag was initiated, tending gradually farther offshore. Apparently some sense of shame remained to the rival gang. They also ranged abroad, but omitted some of the turns and twists of the leading crew.

"They cal'late they've as good a chance as us," Herb explained. "An' they have. No tellin' where the fish 'll show up next."

"They can't be far away," said Jack. "It isn't a half-hour since I sighted them."

"Might be right under our keel this minute and headin' for Noman's Land," rejoined Herb. "We wouldn't know it. Chances are, though, if they're feedin' that they'll pop up somewheres. I wish we had a masthead in the old tub."

The wish being a vain one solicited no reply. He and Jack continued searching the water, one to port and one to starboard. Vision was indeed sadly restricted so near the water's edge. Even ten feet of elevation would have given them the shade of advantage over their competitors which might mean all the difference between success and loss.

Jack gave a sudden exclamation.

"D'you see 'em?" demanded Herb.

"No, but—look—up there on the cliff. It's Jessica."

"Jessica?" Herb turned in the direction Jack indicated. Sure enough, on the brink of the cliff, her figure outlined against the blazing blue sky, stood Captain Zed's granddaughter.

As well as the two men could determine at their distance she was trying to signal. They called the attention of the others in the crew. Charles Hinkley, next to Captain Zed and Jim Tarkis, the oldest man aboard, was, nevertheless, gifted with the sharpest vision.

"It's Jess, an' she's pointin'!" he cried. "Put your wheel to starboard, cap'n. She sees fish, that girl does. Up where she is she can find 'em when we can't see nothin' here."

Over went the wheel.

"Full speed, Charlie," sang out Captain Zed.

Charlie gave her a heavier dose of gasoline, and the boat forged ahead.

"Now pull the dories alongside," came the order. "An' jump in. By mighty, I'm goin' myself. Jack, can you run the engin'?"

"Sure thing," replied Jack promptly.

"Take her, then. Herb, you stay

where you are till we sight them. If the Simcoxes hain't seen Jess—"

The girl, perceiving the signs that her message had been interpreted, had ceased to make motions. Jack, looking across to the other boat as he leaped down amidships, gathered that the Simcoxes had been too intent on the business in hand to trouble about what was taking place ashore, and so had not been the recipients of Jessica's wirelessed information. But there was a sudden stir among them, prompted probably by the activity of the Hoopers.

"They're getting their dories alongside, too," he said.

"Let 'em," growled Captain Zed. "It's a race and we got to beat 'em."

On the heels of this came a cry from the bow.

"There they are!" exclaimed Herb. "Breaking water again. It's a tearin' big school of—somethin'. We dassn't take the work boat no closer."

"Leave her running," Jack directed. "I'll stand off and on. Into the dories quick. The Simcoxes have sighted them, too."

Inside of thirty seconds he was left alone, watching the dories pointing straight for their prey.

Herb Mann's excited explanations located the school of fish close to, if not exactly on, the parallel the Simcox boat was following. This meant a saving of distance for the latter since the Hooper dories were compelled to quarter their course, describing the hypotenuse of a triangle. The winning would hang on oarsmanship.

But would it? For, although the dories were drawn up on either side of the other work boat, its engine was still working, and the craft held on its direct way.

Could their purpose be to try seining from the work boat? Such an attempt meant that the fish would be frightened by the throb of the engine and thrashing of the propeller, and would sound, not to reappear again perhaps until miles offshore. There was not a single chance in a thousand of taking them that way.

Or had Herb made the mistake of over-caution? That was it—the Simcoxes meant to play up closer, slipping their dories at the last second, thereby gaining the necessary inch of advantage. The wide-beamed small boats could not hope to meet the speed of the gasoline-driven Simcox craft.

Acting at first on impulse, Jack threw his wheel over and struck across toward the course his rivals were following. Having done this, he leaped aft to the engine. He could steer from here by reaching out to the cable which ran along the rail to the rudder. He crouched down and studied the race through half-closed lids, his brain working lightning quick.

These were Hooper fish by every right known to the business. The Simcoxes lacked the slightest plank of justice as an excuse for entering the chase. It was a distinct infringement of an immemorial code of ethics.

Yet at first thought there seemed nothing but for him to sit idly, praying for victory for his mates. Victory! The word sounded an almost forgotten chord of memory. A picture not recalled for years rose before his eyes.

He saw the green, chalk-lined gridiron, with its twenty-two figures, himself among them, scattered up and down its length. It was the last five minutes in the important game of the year, and neither side had scored.

The oval sailed into the air and sang its way into his outstretched arms. Dodging, twisting, fleet as a frightened deer and slippery as an eel, he had fought his way through the ranks of the enemy. It had cost the last ounce of strength he could muster, but the clear field he had won was worth it.

Then, dashing his high hopes, there leaped into his range of vision two of the brown-stockinged foemen on whom he had not counted. It was inevitable they should intercept him. And the goal line so near!

A voice sounded in his ear—"Follow your interference, Jack." The owner of the voice charged the nearest of his would-be interceptors. He hurled him out of the path with a toss of his brawny shoulder. Sticking close to that friendly back, Jack saw the second one meet a like fate, and a second later he was behind the enemy's goal posts, and the game was won.

The memory, long as it takes in the telling, flashing across his mental field with the rapidity of light, seemed a direct message. Interference was the watchword. These were Hooper fish; should he lie inertly by and see the catch taken by another, or lost altogether? He gave a tug at the rudder rope, bringing the boat up another point.

One of the Simcoxes, diverting his eyes from the scene ahead, caught a glimmering of Jack's intention. He drew the notice of his mates.

The boats were close enough together now for an exchange of conversation in ordinary tones. Buck Potter's rough bellow to "sheer off" was unnecessarily loud.

Jack held his peace. Every nerve and fiber was alert to the possibilities of the occasion. What he should do must depend on the chance of the moment, but the keynote was interference in some form. The thought of personal consequences was as remote as the farthest star.

"Sheer off or I'll break your head!" Potter shouted again. Jack saw him seize a long, heavy oar and hold it like a lance.

This was different from the football field in various aspects. It was life as distinct from sport. And the stake was gold.

Should he try ramming the other boat amidships? Or was it better merely to head her off? Five minutes would make all the difference in the world to his fellows.

But how to win that five minutes did not occur to him until the boats were dangerously close together. It came then in a flash of inspiration. The vital spot of the enemy was the seine, which was piled in the dory on the work boat's port quarter.

He gave another tug at his rudder rope and headed straight for the other. Seeing him coming, they yelled in unison. As his bow crashed into the small boat, Buck Potter drove at him with his twelve-foot oar.

It caught Jack in the pit of the stomach, and for an instant he thought it had gone clear through him. He fell backward, striking the spinning flywheel, and was brought to his senses by sitting on the hot exhaust pipe.

His bow ground along the dory, smacked into the other work boat, and grated its way along the side. The Simcoxes were a raging, cursing crew. Buck Potter, recovering his poise, rushed forward and drove again with his oar.

This time Jack caught it with his hands and pulled sharply. Thrown off his balance, Potter splashed over the side. He still clung to the oar. Jack, in no mood to play the life-saver, left him to be rescued by his mates.

He was sick and faint from the blow in his stomach. Severe nausea seized him, and he observed with concern that some blood came up. But it was impossible to give way now. He could think of patching himself up after he had helped his gang to land their catch if they made one. He pulled himself together with a tremendous effort and headed in their wake.

CHAPTER XVI.

EAVESDROPPING.

"TH' hull Simcox crowd is out for your scalp, Jack," said Anse Burdick cheerfully. "They say if it hadn't ha' been for you they'd have made that mackerel haul 'stead of us. Buck Potter says he'd have the law on you only 'twould be too easy."

"That'll be all right, Anse, if he will wait till I get on my feet again,"

Jack returned. "Just as soon as I quit spitting blood I'll hunt Buck up and give him a chance."

"Don't you worry none about that, Jack," said Herb Mann. "If it hadn't been for you, likely them Simcoxes would have scared th' school so nobody would have got 'em. As 'twas, that one haul 'll go pretty well to'rds payin' us for th' hull season."

"I haven't heard how you made it yet, Herb," Jack replied. "Tell me about it."

He was lying on a cot in a screened-off corner of the bunk-house assembly-room, talking with his fellows for the first time since he had been brought ashore. His grit had held him up past the hour of need. The instant he had turned the wheel over to another man he had collapsed, and the Barratry Island doctor, hinting darkly at broken blood-vessels and the like, had been in pretty constant attendance.

Jim Tarkis had proved a faithful if rough nurse, and now Jack felt he would soon be himself again. The appreciative words of his companions conduced to improvement.

"Well, soon as we left th' work-boat," Herb began, "I says to the cap'n, says I: 'Them Simcoxes 'd ruther nobody got fish than to let us get them.' And he says: 'I guess that's so.'

"We was keeping close together then, the cap'n, Anse, and Charlie in one dory, me and Peter and Jim Tarkis in t'other. From what I see, 'twas a big school of mackerel.

"All th' time we was keepin' our eyes on you and them Simcoxes. 'Twas clear they meant mischief. 'Twas as barefaced an attempt at stealin' as ever I saw. They hadn't no shadder of right to get out after them fish. Out with th' mackerel fleet a feller that did that would wake up some mornin' to find himself on a mud bottom.

"So when I see you takin' a hand I was glad enough, you bet. I says to Jim Tarkis—"

"Never mind that, Herb," Jack pleaded. "Tell me about how you took the fish. I know the rest of it very well."

"Oh, all right. Well, when we see there wa'n't going to be no trouble with th' Simcoxes we just 'tended to our knittin' and made pretty good time. They was still breakin' water. Th' great trouble with mackerel fishin' is that th' fish'll get scared before you kin whip a seine around them. Then it's good night.

"I had th' seine in my boat. Soon as we got close enough I throws th' cap'n an end and begins payin' out. I tell you, boy, that's excitin' work. There's hundreds of dollars' worth, mebbe thousands, right within arm's reach, so to speak, and you don't know whether you're goin' to take ary one of 'em or not.

"We paid out and paid out till I thought th' old seine wasn't goin' to be big enough to go round them. At last we made th' circle and th' dories came together again. Th' fish wasn't breaking water quite so free now, so we had to be quick with th' pursin' lines. We hauled away like good ones, you bet. Soon as th' seine touched them they tried to sink. Seemed like every last one of them fish had been touched at th' same time, though prob'ly there wa'n't more'n one or two that felt mesh.

"But it was too late. We had 'em pursed in by that time. Then we begun to look around for you. Bein' so busy, we hadn't kept very close watch on what was goin' on with th' Simcoxes except we see they had quit tryin' to take our fish. So we didn't know why it was that soon as Charlie Hinkley jumped aboard th' work boat and took hold of her, you keeled over. Couldn't figger it out no way.

"If you hadn't brought th' boat over I don't know what we should 'a' done. As 'twas, Jim brought you ashore in one of th' dories and got th' doctor. The rest of us had our hands full takin' care of th' catch."

"What did you do with it?" Jack asked.

"Well, don't you let on. 'Count of things bein' the way they are, cap'n's given out that he ain't usin' the pound now, and he ain't been for three or four days because it's been empty. But we didn't think best to throw that almighty big school of fat fish on th' market all to once.

"So we iced twenty bar'ls for the next day steamboat and th' rest we put in th' pound. They're there when we want them. Cap'n has sent on to find out how the market is, and soon as he learns where he can get the best prices he's goin' to send them along. Only way to get your money's worth out of fish is to keep people hungry for them."

Jack closed his eyes and lay quiet a minute. It was pleasant to think he had contributed to this successful turn. Indeed, it had been wholly his achievement, and his fellows gave him credit.

"You'll get your share—a big one, Jack," Herb promised. "More'n you'd make sailin' a barge for a year."

Jim Tarkis appeared and shooed the men away. He wanted to keep Jack an invalid as long as he could, enjoying the sense of authority it gave him.

Captain Zed had been in that morning to see personally that Jack was receiving all the attention he deserved. He also had paid tribute to the young fisherman, acknowledging the debt he and the others owed. His compliments gave the sick man a temporary sense of gratification.

Yet as soon as he was left alone he began to question whether, after all, this were worth the price, were worth the self-denial involved in running away from Butch Horlock. The pit of his stomach was still sore enough to remind him at every movement of Buck Potter's jab.

To stand up to Butch Horlock for a half-hour on the turf that morning would have been the keenest pleasure of his life. He was in an ill mood to judge the merits of his conduct.

Something lay back of the fit of despondency into which he had fallen, a fit so alien to his nature. He told himself he might as well admit it. The cause was the failure of Jessica Hooper to come and see him.

There was no obvious reason why she should not have called. He knew that often, when the crew was away of a morning, she came and visited with old Jim Tarkis, sometimes helping him with the cooking by way of passing the time. And, after all, it was no more than he had a right to expect, after having rescued her from Butch Horlock's unwelcome attentions.

Yet, so far as he knew, she had not even inquired concerning his health. It was impossible she should have failed to hear of his injury. She followed every detail of the Hooper gang's career with the interest of a partner.

It occurred to him, running over events, that he had not passed her on his race to announce the discovery of the mackerel. Yet afterward she had appeared at the top of the cliff. Could she have seen him running and thought he was seeking safety in flight from an enemy?

The blood surged into his face at this conjecture, but immediately the answer offered. She had heard that he brought news of fish, and that was full and adequate explanation of his haste.

Could he have known, there had been an unpleasant quarter-hour for the girl when that very suspicion had found lodgment in her breast. Nursing her sore heart aside from the highway, she had witnessed the breathless passage of the young man. The immediate conclusion which jumped to her mind was precisely what he pictured.

It offered a cruel addition to the load she carried. To have seen him with his arm around another girl was bad enough, but to witness a display of cowardice after offering so brave a front was superfluous degradation.

Like most shore-dwelling women—like most women everywhere, if the truth be known — Jessica Hooper placed personal courage at the head of all manly virtues. The men she knew had it in abundance. Not one of them would flinch before an enemy or dream of saving his own life at the cost of another. It had hardly occurred to her before that a man could be otherwise than brave.

She was so disquieted by the sight and its attendant thought that she forgot her earlier grievance and, rising, started to stroll aimlessly across the fields. Thus she came to the edge of the cliff in time to see the race for the fish.

Understanding came to her in a moment, bringing so grateful a reaction that she could have forgiven Jack that earlier display without asking a question. She stood there witness to the whole proceeding, holding her breath at the spectacle of his interference with the Simcoxes and glowing with delight when from her aerie she saw the successful surrounding of the fish.

Afterward the splendor of these scenes was clouded by a return of that other—the meeting between Jack and the unknown girl. She could never forgive him—never—never. He was a brave man; that she would grant. But she had no sympathy to waste on a man who was not true.

A couple of days in bed erased the effects of the really severe blow Jack had received in the pit of his stomach. He would have been laid up for a month had it not been for the fighter's well-developed corset muscles, hard as a washboard, which armored him. The island doctor stipulated for a week, at the least. His boding persistence forced the young fisherman to make a half-promise to remain where he was at least until the physician's call on the following afternoon.

But that night, after the others had gone to bed, he lay wakeful, longing for somebody to talk to. He was slept out. After tossing around for a couple of hours he got quietly from his bed, slipped on his clothes, and went out.

The night patrol was still maintained, and it was Peter Gomez's watch. Jack's purpose was to hunt him up and indulge in a little conversation.

He liked Peter least of his associates in the Hooper gang, without any defiite reason for disliking him, but since Peter was the only human being he could hope to interchange a word with at that hour he could afford to swallow his tastes. The watchman should be easily found in the limited beat he covered.

It was very still and very dark, but as his eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom he could see enough to make his way about. Peter was not on the fish-house dock, where he had expected to find him. He started leisurely toward the head of the harbor, thinking how good it was to get out of the invalid class and confidently looking to discover his man taking it easy in one of the dories, where he could hear anything which happened, either ashore or on the water.

He was almost at the spot where the dories were beached, walking noiselessly through the powdery sand, when a low murmur of voices reached him. Evidently somebody else was in a companionable mood this evening. He halted to determine the source of the sounds.

Upsided on the sand just above high tide mark was what remained of a superannuated oyster scow. Just why it had been permitted to stay there through so many changing seasons after its usefulness was manifestly ended it would have been difficult to say. Perhaps it was because the fishermen had become too accustomed to it to see it any longer.

At any rate, Jack presently decided that it was from this venerable hull that the voices came. He moved toward it, at first without any other thought than of soliciting the privilege

of participation in whatever debate was in progress.

The bottom of the hulk was toward him. A scrap of the talk on which he had purposed intruding brought him suddenly to a standstill. The voice was that of the man he had come out to find, and he had just exclaimed, with more of protest than of decision in his tones:

"I tell ye I won't have anything to do with it."

"Yes, you will, too," rejoined the other party to the conversation, and emphasized the statement with a round oath. "You will or Cap'n Zed finds out who monkeyed with his comp—"

"Sh-h. Not so loud," warned Peter.

This sounded interesting. Jack Garrett had small use for eavesdroppers. Sometimes, however, eavesdropping became a duty. He concluded not to announce himself until he had learned what it was Peter Gomez would have no hand in.

"Well, you hear me," the other man went on; "you're in this too deep now to pull out. We need you and we're goin' to get you."

"You wouldn't tell on me about that compass, Buck?" Peter pleaded. "It was for you I done it."

"For me and what I paid ye," said the other voice ungratefully. "You're true Bar'try at heart, Pete, and you know it, spite of fishin' with furriners this season. I reckoned on Cap'n Zed gettin' into trouble with that compass, not the girl."

So it was Buck Potter with whom Peter was arguing in the shelter of the decaying oyster scow. This added piquancy to the situation. The odds were easily a hundred to one that they were plotting deviltry.

"Well, I didn't have no hand in cuttin' the cap'n's gill-net adrift," Peter rejoined in a clinching style.

"Who did?" was the reply. "Are you tryin' to make out that I did that? 'Cause if you are—"

"No, no, Buck. Nothin' like that," said Peter quickly. "I was just sayin'—"

"You don't know who cut that gill-net," Buck declared. "And you don't want to know. Same thing about the propeller — you don't know nothin' about that. But you know that new feller that claims to be a barge hand was tellin' the truth about bein' tied up in th' old Wiggins shanty, because you went there and gathered up the ropes. I tell ye, Pete, there's no use of your tryin' to play baby now. You've got to work with us."

Peter, seemingly overborne by sheer weight of argument, remained silent. Buck waited a moment for him to reflect on the situation. Then he opened fire again, cajolingly this time.

"Aw, what's the trouble with you, Peter? You and me's old friends and you're an islander. Do you want to see these others come in and get our fish? First thing you know, Bar'try 'll be overrun with them and nothin' left for the rest of us."

"I ain't goin' to get into no trouble," Peter said doggedly.

"You won't, I tell ye. There ain't no danger to this, worked right, and it'll make them furriners so sick they won't never want to fish off Bar'try no more."

"Besides, there's my share."

"You'll get more this way, won't ye? Now listen. There'll be six of us in on it. We share and share alike. T'other way you get a sixth lay after Cap'n Zed gets his, which don't begin to be as much for you. Do you see?"

"That's so," Peter acknowledged. "Tell me how you cal'late to work it."

"Keep still a minute," said Buck. Silence fell. "I thought I heard somethin'," he added.

What he heard was Jack drawing closer, the better to play his rôle of eavesdropper. The old hull rested on a gunwale which had withstood the gnawing tooth of the elements better than her maker had any right to expect. The boat's sloping side offered admirable cover for his end. Having

gained it, he was practically underneath the other two and could hear their lightest whisper.

This was fortunate, for, having been recalled to remembrance that there were other people in the world, although probably asleep by now, Buck Potter lowered his voice.

"Here's the hull business," he began. "To begin with, the reason I hunted you up to-night was because it won't do for us to be seen talkin' together. Cap'n Zed and his lot have most forgot that you're an islander, and they's no need of remindin' them.

"Now you say most of them mackerel is in the big pound yet. That's right, ain't it?"

Peter grunted assent to the statement.

"All right, then. Cap'n Zed figgers on marketin' them a few bar'ls at a time so's to get top prices. That was the letter he got to-day, wa'n't it?"

Again Peter grunted. "So I heard Herb Mann say," he admitted.

"That was a tearin' big school, and if it hadn't been for that (unmentionable names, which Jack understood to refer to himself) we'd have taken them 'stead of you folks. But that ain't neither here nor there. We'll get caught up with that young feller, all right.

"Meantime, how to get our share of the mack'rel and at the same time make Cap'n Zed sick of the fishin' off here. I got it all planned out. Only it needs you to help.

"Since you fellers been keepin' watch they couldn't no one stir around the cove at night without bein' seen, otherwise we'd have worked Cap'n Zed away from here long before. You'll be on watch again six nights from now—that'll be Monday. Is that right?"

The other agreed that it was.

"Monday night, then, we take our gear and go out to the pound where them fish are. We'll tow out with the dories—the tide's all right about ten o'clock. I'll fix it up with Zylonite Flagg's schooner to be standin' on and off waitin' for us. We'll use the work boat and the dories to lift the mack'rel and put them aboard him. He'll see to icin' and run them to market fast as he can scutter—or if the wind don't serve, put them on the railroad. Anyway, he'll be all fixed up with ice and bar'ls.

"Then we make a big rip in the pound net like as if a schooner or somethin' had trailed acrost it, which was the way the fish got out. And come mornin' we're back at our moorin' and you ain't seen anything all night long. When you go out with the gang to get a few bar'ls of fish you're just as surprised as any one. How's that?"

For a conspirator, Peter Gomez was a timid soul. He immediately began to pick flaws in a scheme in which Buck Potter evidently took a creator's delight.

"Supposin' I sh'ld be sick that night an' some one else sh'ld be on watch? What then?" he asked.

"Well, s'posin' you should?" Buck retorted. "You ain't been sick since I can remember. You take care of yourself and you won't be."

Jack realized from the tones of the precious pair that the affair was as good as settled. It was his play to get back to his bed as quietly as possible before he was discovered.

He managed to beat a retreat while Peter was still endeavoring to find a weak spot in a perfect plan. Having regained his bed, he lay awake a long time, considering how best to put a spike in the machinery of the plotters. It was not until Jim Tarkis's stirring warned him that it must be two o'clock or after that he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIGHT ON THE BEACH.

TAKING advantage of his first opportunity for a private conversation the next day, Jack repeated to Herb

Mann the dialogue he had overheard. The number one man promptly led him before Captain Zed.

His previous experience of keeping information to himself for the sake of sparing the captain's feelings had taught Jack it did not pay. This was an affair, moreover, which required the wit and strength of all hands. Captain Zed heard his recital and Herb's comments thereon without display of surprise. He credited the islanders with an appetite for crime which nothing could sate.

"How're you feelin'?" he asked Jack before expressing himself on the errand that had brought him.

"Me? Oh, I'm all right! Hardly sore a bit. I'll go out with the boats to-morrow."

He looked over to Jessica to see whether the announcement interested her. She remained unmoved. He wished he might have a little aside with her to inquire what had arisen between them.

"Jess, if you'd as soon," said her grandfather, "we're goin' to have a man's talk, and you might do your sewin' in your own room. That is, if you don't mind."

"All right, grandfather," she replied, and departed obediently.

"Now, first off, we've got to save them mackerel," Captain Zed declared. "Peter Gomez, hey? The mis'rable skunk. I give him a lay in my gang over at New Galilee when he was flat busted—didn't have so much as an eel-pot he could call his own. But that's what you got to expect of an islander."

"How're we goin' to do it?" asked matter-of-fact Herb Mann.

"That's the question. How're we goin' to save our mackerel and trim these islanders at the same time. I swun, one's about as important as t'other, to my notion. What do you say, Jack?"

"There's only one way to go at it," was Jack's reply. "That is, to fight."

"I thought you'd say that, after hearin' about the way you cleaned up Buck Potter," said Captain Zed. "But they's a right way and a wrong way to fight. Here's a letter I got this mornin,' Herb."

The missive was an offer from a big fish firm for the whole catch of mackerel, delivered at the earliest possible moment, at a price which rendered it unnecessary longer to dole the fish out a few at a time. The number one man passed it over to Jack, with Captain Zed's permission.

"If fish are worth that now," said the captain, returning the letter to its envelope, "they'll be worth as much in a few days—say next Monday—wouldn't they?"

"What's your plan, cap'n?" asked Herb.

"Monday night these fellers are figgerin' on stealin' the fish and rippin' up my pound net. I've been achin' a long while for a good excuse to take a few larrups at them.

"Now what's the matter with us being out there Monday night when they come, and havin' some fun out of the racket? What's the matter with that, hey? One last kick, as you might say, because the trappin' season's about over, fur's I'm concerned, and we're goin' back to Galilee soon."

"That's all right," Herb agreed, while Jack's eyes sparkled at the prospect. "It's righteous retribution, as you might say, which nobody enjoys more'n I do. But while we was takin' our pleasure, we might be losin' our fish. That wouldn't pay."

"You leave that to me, Herb," said Captain Zed with a sly wink. "I'll warrant ye they won't be a fish missin'. Just keep an eye on Pete betwixt now 'n' then to see that he don't work any funny games in between, an' put him on watch same as usual next Monday night, when his turn comes round."

They omitted the pound the next morning, Captain Zed offering as an excuse that the market was supplied. A few fish were taken on Friday, when Jack had his first opportunity of seeing the fruits of his lucky discovery.

Magnificent fat fish they were, and "a snag of them," as Harley Whaley phrased it. At sixty cents apiece retail, which was Herb Mann's appraisal, they carried back to the bunk-house about three dollars' worth to be broiled for dinner.

He slept late Sunday morning, awakening finally to a sense of a duty delayed and a pleasure to be enjoyed. After a little sleepy cogitation it came to him.

He sprang down from his bunk, dressed, and breakfasted thoughtfully. His companion fishermen were loafing outside as a week before. Anse Burdick offered to accompany him on his walk, but he rebuffed him with the statement that it was a matter of business he had on hand. Then he started off toward Oldham. But after crossing the marsh he left the highway and turned to the beach which was spread along the foot of the cliffs.

This was the hour he had been looking forward to for seven long days. The pressing question was whether it would bring him his desire.

If Butch Horlock had employed the beach as exercise ground one Sunday, he was likely to take his run there another. And Jack Garrett was eager to explain the cause of and apologize for his hasty departure on a previous Sabbath morning.

He walked along the sand for some distance, impatient of the delay until he remembered that the day was yet young and he would probably have to wait. He employed his time by studying the possibilities of various battlegrounds.

The tide was falling, leaving a wide floor of closely packed sand. It lacked spring, but otherwise served the purpose admirably. He tested it with feet and fingers, confirming this judgment.

It was about three-quarters ebb, and he had begun to fear it would turn before the time came, when he saw a jogging figure approaching far down the beach. A little later he knew it was the man he had come to meet.

The Butcher spied him while still a long way off. His pace quickened, if anything, at the sight. He had puzzled a good deal during the week over the Navigator's unforeseen defection, reaching the conclusion that the knockout he himself had administered and his manner of life since had shaken his courage. He more than half expected to see him turn tail now—climb the cliff, jump into the ocean, or in some other manner seek escape in flight.

"Well, see who's here," he greeted Jack. "The little canary bird again. Does your folks know you're out?"

Jack observed with a touch of admiration that despite his long run the Butcher's breathing was regular and unforced; his bellows were clearly in good condition. So much the better. He was sure of his own this time. He could afford to be, as he was, almost affectionate in his greeting.

"Hello, Butcher!" he returned to the other's taunt. "There's a little matter yet unsettled between us—two or three of them, in fact. I owe you an apology for running away last Sunday. I'll tell you why now or later, just as you say."

"Whaddo you want?" growled Horlock. "I'm kind o' sick of you, if you'd like to know. Now you run along or I'll—"

"That's just what I came for, Butch," Jack replied. "I knew you'd feel that way. And you're quite right, when a man breaks in on your training like this. So let's begin where we left off last Sunday. Or would you like to rest up a bit first?"

The Butcher looked at him, puzzled. He could not yet make certain that his old rival proposed to confront him with bare fists. The businesslike way in which Jack threw off his coat almost convinced him.

"So you've got to have it, have you?" he sneered. "Or are you goin' to beat it again? I've seen fellers like you that couldn't be held in a ring with anything short of iron bars."

"I don't blame you, Butch," said

Jack. "My conduct last Sunday was unusual, to put it mildly. But I won't run to-day."

He threw his coat far from him and, stepping up to Horlock, slapped him smartly on the cheek with his open palm.

"There, you big stiff!" he cried. "That for the blow you gave me in the automobile that night. And now—time!"

Sam Levine was taking his Sunday morning ease on the piazza of the training camp. His coat was off, the inevitable "dry smoke" adorned the corner of his mouth, and a two-days' old newspaper was outspread on his knees. He felt at peace with the whole world.

Hurrying footsteps up the path aroused him. He raised his eyes to the figure of a girl who, breathless and clinging to the porch-post for support, cried:

"Are you Mr. Levine?"

"Well?" he said non-committally, dropping his feet from the rail in acknowledgment of a lady's presence.

"I want Mr. Levine—Sam Levine—quick!" the girl went on. "Where is he?"

"Right here. What can I do for you?" Sam replied, finding no advantage in concealment of identity.

"You must come—right away," the girl panted. "Down on the beach—Butch—he's being beaten up. Quick—quick!"

This unexpected statement had the effect of stirring Levine out of his habitual phlegm.

He jumped to his feet and challenged the bearer of tidings.

"Butch Horlock getting beat up?" he repeated. "How's that? How many of them are there?"

"Only one. Oh, why don't you hurry?"

"With a club? Is somebody beating him with a club? Say, what you talking about, anyway?"

"No, not with a club. With fists," said the girl. "I saw it from the top of the cliff. If you're not coming I must run back. Oh, it's terrible!"

Sam perceived that no good was derivable from further questioning. Nevertheless, he was unable to reconcile the girl's declaration with known facts. If there was only one assailant of his fighting man, and he using bare fists, he considered alarm unfounded. Incredulity was written on his face.

The girl, reading it, made one final appeal.

"Are you coming?" she demanded. "Because if you're not—"

"All right—I'm coming," Sam replied. The girl looked sane enough, and it saddened him that so pretty a young woman should be thus tainted. His varied stock of information included the dictum that it was well to humor crazy folks.

So he followed her lead down the path, through a turnstile in the stone wall, and across the fields. By the curving beach it was some distance to the spot where Jack and the Butcher had met, but to the brink of the cliff was only a step. There was a drop of some seventy-five feet from its edge to the water.

"Right down there," said the girl, pointing. "Look—I don't dare—look and tell me if Butch has been killed."

Sam Levine threw himself on a well-cushioned stomach and looked down. The spectacle which met his eyes held him spellbound.

The effect was that of looking at the Metropolitan Opera House stage from the topmost gallery. The two figures dancing around one another on the hard sand floor were curiously foreshortened. He assured himself at the first glance, however, that one, as the girl had said, was that of Butch Horlock.

Who the other was he could not determine immediately. The first impression he received was that it was a real fight, and on both sides was being conducted according to the ethics of the ring.

He noted also that the men were evenly matched as to height, weight and, as well as he could determine, reach. They had settled to their fighting with the earnestness of a set purpose. This girl, whoever she was—one of Butch Horlock's light-loves, doubtless — had become needlessly alarmed for the safety of her friend. Outside of the champion himself there was nobody who could stand up to the Butcher long, in the pink of condition as he was.

The scene engrossed him so completely that he forgot to give the girl tidings as to the progress of the fray. A repetition of her request fell on deaf ears. She recalled herself to his notice by dropping flat beside him, to look for herself.

"Oh, can't you do something?" she urged. "I'm so afraid he will get hurt."

"The Butcher? You should worry —hi, look at that!" he broke off suddenly.

The exclamation had been provoked by a lead to Horlock's face which, landing on his eye, sent him staggering backward. His opponent, instead of trying to follow up the advantage, calmly awaited his recovery.

This sight threw a different illumination on Sam's opinion. Quite unmindful of the groan with which the girl beside him saw the punishment administered, he summoned all his professional judgment to a study of Horlock's antagonist.

Too far away, as well as badly placed, to make out his features, he was struck by a familiarity of his style. Such a workmanlike manner of fighting, such finish in leading and defense, he had encountered only once during his long intimacy with the ring. Even yet, however, he could not acknowledge the possibility of what his subconsciousness warned him.

Another thing struck him. This was that Butch's opponent was taking the affray far more easily than Horlock himself. He had seen a half dozen openings where the fighter whose personality lingered at the back of his mind would have bored in and finished the job in quick order. That he refrained from doing so helped to defer the moment of recognition.

The pair fought with due regard to such provisions of the moral code as striking in breaks, but without any suspension for rests. Presently it came to Sam Levine that the unknown was merely playing with Horlock—that he was his master at every point of the fight, competent to finishing him whenever he liked. At the same instant, incredulity evaporating, he muttered aloud:

"The Navigator!"

He became aware that the girl had crept close to him and had grasped his hand in the excitement of fear. She seemed fascinated by the sight. He was only half aware of her quick response:

"Yes, it's Jack Garrett. It's the Navigator."

She ended with a little scream. Sam Levine had seen it, too.

Butch Horlock had tried to force matters, as if rendered desperate by the opposition he was encountering. It may be he counted on forcing Jack to give ground. If so, he calculated badly.

Instead of giving back a single inch his antagonist advanced his foot and planted himself firmly. He had satisfied his desires—to pay Horlock the debts he owed, and to demonstrate for his own satisfaction that he had not gone back. It would be several days before Horlock would have wiped out entirely the marks of this encounter.

It was therefore useless to carry it farther. As Horlock rushed he took careful aim and drove with the full momentum of his strong shoulders.

The blow caught his old rival on the point of the chin. His knees gave way beneath him and he sank in a limp heap on the sands.

Sam Levine found himself counting —one, two, three, four. He was recalled by a groan from the girl at his

side. The hand which clutched his turned limp and cold. Looking at her he found she had fainted.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SAM LEVINE'S PROBLEM.

THE fact that he had just sustained one of the great surprises of his life was insufficient to stifle Sam Levine's humanitarian instincts. Disengaging his attention from the beach below, which indeed had yielded up as much of its story as interested him, he put into practise such simple methods of restoring consciousness as he was familiar with.

Finding them ineffective, after a couple of minutes he gathered the girl in his arms and staggered across the fields, toward training quarters. Before he had covered half the distance he was blown and reeking. His habits had unfitted him for a career of life-saving. He was overflowing with gratitude that the distance was short.

He clung pluckily to his self-imposed task, and, having gained the house and laid the girl's limp form on a sofa, shouted loudly for his factotum Mac. Together they labored to bring her back to her senses.

When their efforts were had been rewarded he bade Mac get out. Intuition suggested that he was due to obtain some information best suited to private possession, for the moment, at any rate.

"Is he dead?" she murmured.

"Who? Butch? Dead? Why, he ain't even wounded," Sam replied encouragingly. "He ain't half as bad off as you. Here, a touch of this sherry won't hurt you none."

The girl drank obediently and in a couple of minutes was able to sit up. Sam had been waiting for this to propound a number of highly important questions. His first was:

"Say, what's your name, anyway?"

"Vesta Dawn," she replied.

"Vesta Dawn!" He placed her instantly, and the discovery merely added another perplexity to the situation. He headed for it directly. "I thought you was Jack Garrett's girl," said he.

"Me? Why, I don't know how you came to think that, Mr. Levine," Vesta gave back. "Butch and I are engaged to marry."

"But — but —" Sam stammered confusedly. He decided to let that line of inquiry wait. "How'd you happen to see that fight?"

She looked up quickly, and he noted a flicker of pain in her eyes. The corners of her mouth drooped. She broke out, unexpectedly to herself as well as to him:

"Oh, Mr. Levine, could you help me? Would you? Butch has promised to marry me. But he got the swelled head through beating Jack Garrett, and worse when you took him to fight Reilly, and now he says he won't till after the fight, anyway, and I don't know if he will then. And he ought—"

She stopped suddenly. Sam pressed his previous question.

"How'd you come to be there when they was fighting?"

"Why, I—I knew Butch ran on the beach. I'm stopping over to Oldham, at the Imperial. Sometimes I come over mornings and meet Butch and we have talks. That's how I came to be there to-day. I—well, I wanted to see him."

A lurking sense of something behind these strange happenings he should know about pushed Sam on to cross-examination.

"You can make your mind easy about Butch not being hurt much," he consoled. "I've seen Jack Garrett hand out that sleep-producer before. He knows just how to slam it across without making it too painful. Say, were you there when it started? How'd they happen to fight, I'd like to know?"

"Yes; I was waiting. I saw Jack come along the beach from off that way. He acted like—"

"Hold on a minute. Did you know he was on Barratry? What's his business here?"

"I saw him last Sunday. He told me he's a fisherman. As I was saying, he acted like he was waiting for somebody, too. He sort 'of stuck around right under where I was sitting. By and by Butch came down the beach. I couldn't hear what they said, except one word. I saw Jack slap Butch in the face, and then they fought. Oh, it was terrible!"

"What was the word?"

"It was 'Time.'"

A smile stole across Sam Levine's face. He was glad to learn that the formalities had been observed.

"That's all I want to know about that. Now let's go back a bit—back to last spring in New York. You say you are Butch Horlock's girl; but Jack Garrett thought you were his then. Now didn't he?"

"He—I—Butch—" the girl stammered.

"Didn't he?" Sam repeated.

"Well, for a little while."

"About the time of his fight with Horlock—just before it? Was that the time?"

"I guess so," she replied hesitatingly.

"You was a showgirl in 'Bung Voyage' then at the Buckingham?" he went on interrogatively.

"Yes, I was."

"And the night before his fight with the Butcher, Jack and you went out to supper together? And he lost his fight? Is that right?"

"Ye-yes, Mr. Levine."

"All right. Now I'm going to ask you a question that I asked Jack after that fight, and he ain't answered it yet. Why did he lose that fight?"

He fixed the girl with a gaze so piercing that she felt he was looking into her inmost soul. Still weak from her fainting spell and suspecting him of knowing more than he did, she told the truth.

"Oh, Mr. Levine, I—Butch didn't mean any harm. It meant so much to him to win that fight. Look what it's done for him. You wouldn't have taken him on but for that, would you?"

He held his peace, waiting for her to continue.

"Well, Butch got me to help. Jack was a nice boy, and I liked him. I tried to make Butch see it wasn't right to put that stuff in his coffee, but he made me. I—I had to do it, Mr. Levine. You don't know."

"Dope, eh?" exclaimed Levine as the truth came to the surface. "And Butch Horlock's trick! Did Jack know?"

"Not then he didn't. He guessed it afterward."

A few more direct, insistent questions brought out the remainder of the tale. Vesta laid much more of her soul bare to the keen inquisitor, schooled to human nature, than her words alone confessed. Ere he had finished Sam had the story's last link.

If only he could have known all this before, how differently the current of his affairs would have run! And it was not yet too late. But was it not? He wrinkled his brow in thought.

Vesta's voice reminded him of her presence.

"I guess I'd better be going, Mr. Levine. I wouldn't like for Butch to find me here."

He was brought back to the manner in which she had introduced the subject. He felt sorry for her, knowing Butch as he did, and would have liked to be of assistance.

"So you and Butch are going to get married, eh?" he said.

"Oh, you mustn't let on what I've told you, will you?" she begged. "He would never speak to me again."

"Come, now," returned Sam as kindly as he could; "you started to say I should advise you, or something, and about the Butcher having a swelled nut. It don't quite get to me what that's got to do with you and him getting married."

"Don't you see?" she began earnestly. "It's like this — Butch and me were engaged before he fought Jack Garrett. He was only pretty good then, Butch was, but I—I loved him just the same, and so he did me.

"Then he thought he saw a way to break through to the top. You know how I helped him. Just at first he was grateful. We were going to be married before long.

"Then you gave him his chance. It was the biggest thing ever came to Butch. He was going to have a go with the champion."

"I had to have some one — but never mind. Go ahead," growled Sam.

"Well, after that Butch wasn't the same any more. Just as I tell you, he got the swelled head. It seemed like I wasn't good enough for him. But it was too late to talk that way then. Oh, believe me, Mr. Levine, he mustn't back out."

Sam nodded, with a face like a storm cloud.

"Go ahead," he said curtly.

"Well, that's about all, excepting that he puts it off and puts it off. The last thing was that he couldn't, anyway, until after the fight. Honestly, though, it wouldn't make any difference. I wouldn't bother him. I promise you. If you could only help me!"

"So Butch has the big head, has he?" was Sam Levine's first comment when her story was ended. "P'h'aps it ain't swelled so much now as it was at breakfast time. Such a bump he got."

A moment later, upon Vesta's rising, he ordered her to sit down again.

"Wait a minute, can't you?" he said. "I got to think, ain't I? But what can I do? There ain't any law makes a man marry if he doesn't want to that I know of."

"It's like this, Mr. Levine," Vesta explained. "When a man is successful and way up, with everything coming his way, he hasn't much use for a woman. He thinks he has his pick of a lot of them then.

"It's when a man is down that he needs us. He wants sympathy and to be petted and all. Are you married, Mr. Levine?"

"No, *Gott sei dank!*" was the reply.

"Then probably you don't know how it is, but that's the living truth. And I'm afraid of what will happen if Butch wins the belt. Because then he will be worse than ever; do you see? If I hadn't helped him to fix Jack Garrett and Jack had got the decision in that fight last spring, we'd have been happily married by now."

"Happily, I don't know," said the man. He rose in intimation that the interview was over. "Now don't you worry none about the Butcher winning that there championship. That's one stick out of your path. For the rest I don't know yet, but it seems to me like he'll be hunting for sympathy before long. Let him know where you are, so he can get it when the time comes."

Lacking a vehicle, he called Mac to escort Vesta to her hotel. After he had been left in solitary possession he retired to his bedroom and locked the door.

It was his way when some knotty problem arose on which he wanted to concentrate all his faculties. The question he was called on to answer had nothing whatever to do with the relations of Vesta Dawn and Butch Horlock.

As for the latter, Sam had taken him on with full knowledge that if he won the championship fight for which he was matched it would be by luck rather than merit. As he constantly reminded himself, he was a business man. The loser's end of the purse would recoup him for the expenditure. And there was the loophole by virtue of which he could substitute a better man if he could find one.

This morning he had seen Jack Garrett fight, and he knew him stronger,

quicker, more skilful than he had ever been before. "This fishing business," he told himself, sitting like a Semitic Buddha, chin on breast and hands clasped across his abdomen, "must be good for exercise." He made a mental note for future reference.

He was a fool not to go to Jack Garrett forthwith and dazzle him with offers. There was probably not a shadow of a doubt that the youth would return to his colors. And Jack could whip the champion.

What was the deterrent? Sam knew perfectly well, and out of his knowledge cursed the conscience he had been born with. After sixty minutes of weighing and balancing, with complete realization that another sixty and yet another would still find him up against that blank wall of a conscience, he turned to his table, uncapped the ink-bottle, and wrote a hasty letter.

As if fearful of having to renew his struggle, he shouted loudly for Mac, whom he had heard return. When that individual appeared he handed him the letter.

"Go over to one of the hotels and get a special delivery stamp," said he. "Put it on this and mail it. If it doesn't catch to-morrow morning's boat somebody loses hair."

"Yes, sorr," said Mac and retired.

CHAPTER XIX.

A NAVAL ENGAGEMENT.

CAPTAIN ZED'S plan of campaign included Peter Gomez, contrary to the counsel of Herb Mann.

"No tellin' what the snippet 'll do," pointed out the number one man. "Soon as he finds we're onto the game he'll make bother."

"That's just why I want him," Captain Zed retorted. "If a feller's tryin' to knife you and you have him where you can keep an eye on him, you're just so much better off, ain't you? Leastways, that's how I always figger."

But when they came to look for Peter on the important night he had disappeared. The last seen of him was when he set off, after supper, to his turn of patrolling.

The explanation was, as Captain Zed learned later, that Gomez, knowing his service as watch to be valueless and preferring an alibi, even at the cost of being guilty of neglecting duty, to becoming involved in any way as accessory, had headed for Carroll's saloon, where he passed the evening.

Peter Gomez was never cut out for a high-grade villain. To dispose of his case finally, he returned home after midnight and, being in need of a drink of water, went into the bunk-house.

A preternatural calm reigned under the roof which usually at this hour resounded with the snores of hard-working fishermen. Peter was at a loss to understand it. He stood in the kitchen with the dipper half-way to his lips until the stillness got on his nerves.

It compelled him to tiptoe into the bunk-room. A horrible thought occurred that Buck Potter's lawless scheme included, unknown to him, cutting the throats of his comrades. He stretched a trembling hand out to the nearest bunk.

It was empty. So was the one above it, and so also were the rest. Jim Tarkis's cot in the kitchen had not been slept in.

A flash of intelligence grasped Peter. He realized what had happened. Captain Zed and the others had got wind of the plot and had gone out to checkmate it.

Notwithstanding that Peter's mouth was drier than ever with apprehension—for his own part in the affair could hardly be hidden—he hung the dipper back on the pail without tasting the water, and ran to where the dories were beached. They were missing. Then he knew absolutely.

He did not wait to reason. His brain was in poor condition for such processes, even had his nerve been equal to it. He made all speed back

to the bunk-house, gathered his personal belongings into a bundle, and, fearful at every step that he would be brought to account, set out for the home of a distant cousin on the farthest point of Barratry.

The object of the night sally had been kept a secret between the captain, his number one man, and Jack. With Jim Tarkis, the party numbered seven. Not until they were grouped at the water's edge did Captain Zed offer an explanation.

"These dumb Simcoxes, with Buck Potter eggin' them on, cal'late to steal our mackerel and cut up our pound for shoestrings," he said vehemently. "Now I know none of you boys are goin' to stand for that."

"You bet we ain't," came in a hoarse, hushed chorus.

"I thought best to go out there in skiffs 'stead of takin' the work boat," the captain explained. "'Twon't make so much noise. What we want to do is to sneak up and catch 'em in the act. Then we'll have a good enough excuse for—well, we'll have a good enough excuse. Ain't that right, Herb?"

"That's right, cap'n," growled Herb.

"There's seven of us, every one as good as two Simcoxes, and there ain't but five of them. We'll go out in three skiffs."

"But won't they get away before we come up with 'em?" asked Charlie Hinkley anxiously.

"Not if we're spry," the captain replied with a chuckle. "It'll keep 'em busy a while huntin' for them mackerel."

As Captain Zed had remarked, there were three skiffs where ordinarily there were but two. Where the third had come from nobody knew. But the sharp eyes of Herb Mann, who was assigned to its command, noted a striking resemblance to one whose title resided in Captain Eb Spencer, of New Galilee.

This being none of his affair, he kept his mouth shut and assumed command of the craft, with Jack Garrett for mate and crew. Charlie Hinkley, with Anse Burdick, occupied another, and in the third were the captain, Harley Whaley, and Jim Tarkis.

Silently the punitive expedition pulled down to the harbor mouth. Captain Zed had timed the setting forth to the hour of slack low tide when, if the current fell short of being helpful, it at least was non-partizan.

Jack and Herb talked in low tones. The former asked what action was to be taken.

"Depends on what we find," Herb replied. "You don't mind a little scrap, do you?"

"Don't know that I do," Jack admitted, "as long as it's in a good cause."

"I didn't think you would after th' way you shook up Buck Potter," said Herb dryly. "Cap'n told me to watch him and follow suit."

The pound was anchored about a mile offshore to the eastward of the harbor mouth, out of the path of navigation. The three dories held close together, Captain Zed in the lead. The rowlocks had been greased, and their progress was almost noiseless.

Within a quarter of a mile of their destination Captain Zed came to until the others drew up beside.

"Listen here, boys," he said softly. "We don't know what we're goin' to find over yonder. But if there's any robbin' of the pound it ain't no time for soft words. Give 'em hot shot.

"So when we come up, if, as I say, we find anybody doin' what hadn't ought to be done, I'll take the nighest boat and board it. Herb, you and Jack go for th' next one. Charlie and Anse will make for the work boat. Is that all clear?"

"All right, cap'n," came from Herb and Anse.

"Come along, then, and keep close," the captain ordered.

The pace was slackened and extra care taken to avoid making a sound.

Five minutes brought them close to the pound. The captain stopped again to survey the situation.

Jack, leaning on his oar, could make out a darker blot against the background of water and night. Suppressed voices reached him, together with the splashing of water and the grate of mesh drawn over a boat's edge. The Simcoxes were deep in their work.

"Now — let 'em have it!" roared Captain Zed.

At the word his skiff shot ahead. Herb Mann and Jack were close behind. The former was standing upright, passing orders to his companion.

"Give it to her, Jack!" he shouted. "Put some muscle in it! Port oar—port—ah, there you are!"

There was a tremendous crash as the dory rammed one of the Simcox fleet square. The force of the collision threw Jack from his thwart and left him floundering in the bilge.

He rebounded like a rubber ball. It was the matter of a second to gain his feet and spring for the bow. He found himself alone in the dory, Herb having boarded the enemy in seamanlike manner.

Cries of surprise and rage arose from the rammed skiff and its neighbor at the other corner of the pound. These circumstances Jack recovered from his memory later. At the moment his entire attention was concentrated on joining Herb.

The latter had his hands full, the two occupants of the Simcox boat having met his rush with vigorous opposition. An ever-widening gap separated the skiffs. Without stopping to question whether or not he could cover it, Jack leaped.

More by luck than design he made his distance. His feet landed on the sloping sides of the skiff. Its occupants were an intertwined mass on the floor boards, but one of them promptly disentangled himself to face the newcomer. His bulk told Jack it was his old acquaintance, Potter.

The kind of fighting circumstances compelled was not one in which Jack excelled. He tried to plant himself for a blow. The instability of the boat forbade. There was nothing for it but to accept conditions as they were, which meant the rough-and-ready wrestling in which length of arm and brute strength gave the advantage.

He very presently realized that Buck Potter's muscles deserved their reputation. In sheer lifting power the giant was immeasurably his superior. He sparred briefly for a hold, his adversary seeking to enwrap him in his mighty grasp.

Instinctively, Jack ducked, with a forward bend which brought his head to the other's waist. At the instant of feeling the foeman's touch his arms clasped and clung in an unscientific but fairly effective buttocks clutch.

A new kind of fighting, this in the dark, on the floor of a rocking skiff, under suspension of all known rules. A new kind, but Jack liked it. He pushed mightily and lifted.

Buck Potter's charge, combined with his ponderous shoulders and outstretched arms, overbalanced him. For a fraction of a second he was carried fairly off his feet. Then—there was a splash, and both men were overboard, Jack holding like a bulldog.

He was compelled to let go presently, however, to avoid being drowned. A skilled swimmer, he popped to the surface and felt for his antagonist. He could not find him.

A sudden ominous silence had fallen on the face of the recently disturbed waters. Expecting every instant to be called on to renew his fight, Jack made a couple of strokes this way and that with the desire to carry the war to the enemy. But Potter had vanished.

"Herb!" he sputtered, blowing the water out of his mouth.

"Where are you, Jack?" came the response some ten feet away. "I've got this feller all right. It's Andrew Littlejohn."

"I've lost my man," Jack replied. "Buck Potter. We went over together."

"Oh, Lord!" Herb exclaimed. "Potter can't swim."

A boding chill struck at Jack's heart. He had not desired to be the cause of any man's death.

"Quick—see if there's a lantern," he called. "There must be one."

He was unable to understand why, if Buck had sunk he had failed to rise again. There was no time, however, to reason that out, or even to wait for the lighting of the lantern which doubtless reposed somewhere in the Simcox dory, unless it had been broken in the mêlée.

Arching himself porpoisewise, he dove, thanking his stars for the happy accident by reason of which he was wearing light canvas shoes instead of the sea-boots which usually went with boat expeditions.

He swam with his eyes open into the blackness of the pit. The absolute hopelessness of the undertaking stimulated him to the exercise of unsuspected powers. He had not known before how good a swimmer he was.

Even so, there was not a chance in a million of his being able to render assistance to the vanished man. Mental images flickered through his brain, like moving pictures on a screen. He wondered how deep the water was; he wondered why Potter had not come to the surface at least once.

His outreaching fingers closed on something—a linen thread. The realization came with a lightning-flash that he and his antagonist had fallen inside the pound net.

Even before his brain had registered this shred of information, his other hand came in contact with an unyielding bulk. It was a man's body.

He slipped an arm around it and tried to rise. The supply of breath he had carried under was nearly exhausted. His chest strained to the bursting-point and bright lights danced across his retina.

The body budged a little, then stuck. The explanation of Buck Potter's failure to come to the surface was at hand. He had become ensnarled in the pound he had plotted to rob.

Keeping himself under by holding to the apparently lifeless giant's clothing with one hand, Jack felt for his clasp-knife, opened it with his teeth, and began sawing away at the net. It was blind work now—no time to feel for the trap which had caught and held the thief. And if he released his hold, Jack knew he would be unable to get down there again in time.

Suddenly he felt himself rising. Both were rising. Together, his fingers still entwined in Potter's clothing, they popped to the surface like corks released from submerged bottles. He drew a long breath, which stung with the venom of hot needles, and, treading water, held his enemy's head out of the sea.

Herb Mann's voice calling came as from vast distances. To his great surprise, Jack saw the light of a lantern. It was his first intimation that he had been under long enough for them to put it in commission.

"Here, Herb," he answered faintly.

Herb and Littlejohn, working with the single aim of saving life, relieved him of his burden. While Jack clung to the rail, they lifted Buck Potter's still inanimate form into the skiff, after which they performed a similar service for his rescuer.

"By gorry, Jack! By gorry!" Herb kept exclaiming under his breath, as first aid to the apparently drowned was administered to the giant.

Jack understood. Herb was little given to the employment of even the mildest expletives. For him the two words constituted eloquence.

Meantime the battle had been fought and won on the other boats, Barratry Island's greatest naval engagement. Victory for the Hoopers had been a foregone conclusion, for to superior strength had been added the elements of surprise and a just cause.

The other dory, in charge of Len Reed and Jim Frost, had been an easy conquest, while Abel Harris, who on the far side of the pound waited with the work boat to receive the mackerel, saved himself from punishment by surrendering without a blow. This was a keen disappointment to Charlie Hinkley and his companion.

Captain Zed, however, had accomplished what he set out to, which was to thwart the would-be thieves, to beat them up as far as excuse offered, and hold over their heads the threat of legal action in case of further depredations on his property. He came over to Herb Mann to explain matters.

Buck Potter was just showing signs of returning consciousness. Captain Zed heard the story without comment. When it was apparent that the man could as well be left to the tender mercies of his fellows, he gave the order to come aboard and make for port.

In lieu of the pleasure he had expected to experience from beating up whomever he found in the work-boat, Charlie Hinkley had compelled Harris, under pain of his active displeasure, to round up the Hooper skiffs. Now all hands on both sides were gathered around the dory which contained Potter.

"You fellers might as well be gettin' back, too," said the captain. "Else you'll lose your beauty sleep. No, we don't want no tow. We're able to row yet a while. I guess you'd better get Buck to bed just as soon as you can."

With some difficulty Buck was loaded on the launch. Just before they started an idea occurred to Herb.

"Say, cap'n, did you search 'em?" he asked.

"Search 'em for what?" the captain returned.

"Why, for mackerel. They might have some stowed away, for all we know."

Jack Garrett's mind leaped back to the object of their night adventure.

"Captain—Herb—we'll lose all those fish!" he exclaimed. "I had to cut the pound to get Potter loose."

Captain Zed chuckled.

"You fellers might as well quit worryin'," said he. "Eb Spencer come across from New Galilee last night and lifted every last fish in the pound. They're safe at Fulton Market by now."

CHAPTER XX.

AN UNEXPECTED OFFER.

To the lover the only use of a decoration is to give it to the object of his admiration.

Jack Garrett had opportunity within the next twenty-four hours to learn this immemorial truth. Herb Mann headed the procession which laid tributes of appreciation at his feet.

"That was a fine thing to do, Jack," said he, holding out his calloused, water-marked hand. "I sh'ld like to think I'd show as much pluck when th' time comes."

Jack stammered and felt himself blushing. After Herb came the rest, each by himself, when there was nobody around to observe, and each in a different way telling Jack what he thought of his conduct.

Among them was Captain Zed. In view of the night excursion, the Tuesday morning visit to the traps was suspended and a holiday declared. The captain called Jack one side.

His tribute was as embarrassed yet hearty as the others. He ended up with:

"I guess after this, and Pete Gomez turnin' out such a skunk, there don't nobody question but what you told the livin' truth about them trippin' and tiein' you up that first night you went on watch. My granddaughter same as told me at th' time I was a fool not to believe it, but it was consid'able of a yarn."

"That's all right, captain," said Jack. "I hope we don't have any more trouble from them."

"That we won't," declared Captain Zed. "Four out of the five got beat up and one almost drownded, and I've give them fair warnin' that the next time anything happens, whether it's their doin' or some one else's, I'm goin' straight to court with this business of robbin' my pound. If there isn't enough law on Bar'try to reach them, I'll carry it to the mainland."

The climax occurred with a call from Buck Potter. The big fellow sidled into the camp of the enemy as downheartedly as a dog taken in pursuit of sheep.

"I've just been to see Cap'n Zed," he stated — "t' tell him that anybody that makes any more trouble for him has got me to reckon with."

"That's good. I'm glad to hear it," Jack returned.

"Yep. And him and me have fixed it up for me to rent his shanties and fish-house next season. He says he's had all th' fishin' off Bar'try he wants.

"I told him he needn't be afraid of anybody botherin' him, but he said 'twan't that. He says that when a man gets his age he likes to be where he can see his friends. I reckon that's so."

These divagations Jack understood to trend toward an expression of thanks. He attempted to forestall or at least to render Potter's position less difficult by remarking:

"I hope I didn't hurt you any last night."

Buck bent on him a smile of bucolic admiration.

"Naw, you didn't. Say, you— you're a strong feller."

He shot out his paw, gave Jack's hand a twist that made it tingle, and departed hastily.

All this was agreeable enough. Jack was conscious of having done a fine thing, and it was heart-warming to think that he had been the agent of beating down the hostile spears of the islanders. If he had failed in his previous calling, he had justified himself in this.

The fly in his ointment was that from Jessica alone was he without recognition. If he could receive an assurance that she knew of and appreciated his importance!

Why did she avoid him? In what manner had he offended her? They had separated that night when she had joined him in his watch with the feeling, on his side, at any rate, of a half acknowledgment of — well, something more than friendship, at any rate. She had permitted him to retain her hand. She had given him clasp for clasp. He had kissed her.

It never occurred to him to suspect Jessica of coquetry. Her nature was as straightforward, as steadfast, as the scented southwest breeze that blew across Barratry these long summer days.

He had gone down to the fish-house dock to think matters over. He knew now beyond the shadow of a doubt that he loved Jessica. He would tell her so like a man and get her answer.

He was on the point of returning to the bunk-house when Harley Whaley came down to tell him that a man was at the house asking for him. He went back at once. Sitting on the bench, his back against the wall and an unlighted cigar between his teeth, was Sam Levine.

"Hello, Jack!" the caller greeted him.

"Hello, Sam!" said Jack quite as coolly. He stretched out his hand, which Sam shook without a smile.

"I'm stopping over here in the Farnsworth house, if you know where that is. Farmhouse back here a ways," said Sam with a wave of his fat hand.

"I know," Jack admitted. He was wondering what had brought his former manager thus far, Levine being an open enemy to all forms of exercise, and the distance between the two points being considerable to one of his habit.

"If you got time, I'd like to have you come over with me."

"Now? What for?" the young man returned, a little surprised.

"There's matters to talk over," Sam replied. "Business matters. I—well, fact is I was lookin' over our accounts and found there was somethin' due you. Not much — a little," he added hastily.

Jack recognized this for a subterfuge and smiled to himself. It would do no harm to find out what was in Sam's mind. The two started off together.

They walked for some distance without interchange of a word, each a little embarrassed by memory of their last parting. Sam was first to break silence. He surprised his companion by remarking:

"You ain't quite as quick with your mitts as you used, Jack."

"What's that?" the young man returned.

"I say you ain't quite as quick. Only for that, I don't see but what you're better than you ever were. Stronger, too, I shouldn't wonder. You'll have to work with the bag and a sparring partner to get them leads away faster."

Jack, stopping short, stared at him.

"What do you know about it?" he demanded.

"Me?" returned Sam innocently. He spat out the remnants of his dry smoke. "Oh, nothing much! I just saw you day before yest'day over here on the beach. You know."

It was the young man's first intimation that his encounter with the Butcher had had witnesses. He asked Sam how he happened to have been near the spot. The manager explained.

"Young woman comes running up and butts in on my comfort," said he. "Says her fellow's being killed with the bare hands down by the sea. Soon as she told me it was Butch, of course I thought she was crazy; but she made me go over, and I saw. That's all. Wouldn't take you long to get up speed, I guess, Jack?"

"Don't know," Jack replied briefly. "Who did you say the—er—young woman was, Sam?"

"Name of—oh, I've forgot! It doesn't matter, does it?"

He looked at Jack questioningly. Affairs of the heart were to Sam Levine mysterious, complicated matters regarding whose effects he knew only what he had observed among his acquaintances. Just possibly his companion might be nursing a great sorrow because of Vesta Dawn's preference for Horlock.

Jack understood the manager's point of view. He knew it must have been Vesta who had summoned help. She would have been waiting around, as on the previous Sunday, for an opportunity to speak with Horlock.

There was nothing to be gained, however, by following up this line of talk. Besides, Sam's opinion of his performance was of more immediate interest.

"Probably I am a little slow at sparring," he admitted. "What do you expect? I haven't seen a punching-bag or faced a boxer since the last time I saw you. But it seemed to me that when my punch did come it was more powerful than it used to be."

"Sure it was," Sam returned. His enthusiasm blazed out with a return to the subject he had made the serious business of his life. "You got more steam behind it, Jack, than you ever had. There ain't nobody could take that punch if you sent it across."

"My wind was all right, too," Jack pursued. "Of course, working faster on hard canvas I might blow, but it's pretty good. Nothing like the kind of life I've been leading, Sam, to put a man in condition—hard work, plenty of food and sleep, no night restaurants and all that sort of thing."

In the technical, hearty talk which followed the sense of strangeness between the two evaporated. Simultaneously they arrived at the Farnsworth house and the old footing of mutual confidence.

Jack had always liked Sam Levine. He had had sufficient reason for both liking and gratitude, and was ready to

admit it. The Jew had put him in a line of work which was enjoyable and profitable. He had treated him not only with fairness but generously. Nobody was more capable of realizing all this than Jack Garrett. He appreciated it, also.

When the glamour of New York's night life had faded he had been able to appraise his own conduct in the partnership, and had found it sadly lacking. He would have liked to say as much to Sam in the course of their walk. But these are things men find difficulty in telling one another.

If only an opportunity arose to demonstrate his gratitude in some physical or material way, he thought, how gladly he should seize it. But the thought was a boyish one. Sam Levine was too important and prosperous a personage to need his help.

A parallel line of thought nearer the surface of his mind concerned itself with his former manager's probable reasons for inviting him to training headquarters. The explanation of an overlooked debt was too evidently a ruse to be entertained for a moment.

He revolved many and various possible motives, and dismissed them all. The true one never for an instant occurred.

For as they strolled across the grass, Sam puffing and perspiring in the close, muggy atmosphere—the wind had died and thunderheads were marshaling along the western horizon—a figure rose out of a chair on the piazza and stood awaiting them. A single glance sent Jack running ahead with the astonished cry:

"Uncle Lawrie!"

The man thus addressed returned the greeting with equal warmth. He met Jack half-way, grasped the outstretched hand, and patted him affectionately on the shoulder.

"Jack, my boy!" he exclaimed. "I could hardly believe I had found you at last. Why did you do it?"

They stood studying one another briefly before Jack replied. Despite the difference in their years, the family resemblance was inescapable.

Lawrence Follansby was as tall a man as his nephew even yet, in his late sixties. The easy life he had led had left few traces on his face. Gentleman was the word one would intuitively have applied.

His expression was of kindness and indulgence. As Jack looked into his eyes he felt himself more an ingrate than ever before for having caused his generous guardian anxiety.

"I was ashamed to face you again, Uncle Lawrie," he replied. "You told me the next scrape I got into I could get out of by myself. It wasn't a creditable row either. I had no excuse."

"But you knew I didn't mean it, Jack," the older man returned. "I tried in every possible way to get track of you, even through detectives. You seemed to have vanished out of the world."

Sam, having followed at a more leisurely pace, mounted the piazza and threw himself into a reed chair, where he struggled for breath. Jack took his uncle by the arm and led him to a seat.

"I went in the navy," he explained briefly.

"But, Great Scott, Jack, if I had known you had any inclinations that way I could have got you a commission. The idea of a Follansby—and the last of our line, by the way—shipping before the mast. It's—it's incredible."

"They don't have masts now, uncle," said Jack, smiling—"only fighting masts. But I didn't disgrace the name, for two reasons. One, that I shipped as Jack Garrett, and the other that it's no disgrace if a man does his duty. I got an honorable discharge."

"Yes, yes, I know all that, boy. But—well, never mind. It doesn't seem to have done you any harm. You're looking remarkably fit."

"But how did you happen to run across me here?" Jack asked, reverting to his earlier question. "It's the last place on earth I should have expected to see you."

"Have a cigar, Jack, and I'll tell you. What, no smoking? Perhaps it's just as well. My doctor tells me"—as he neatly severed the end of a black perfecto and flipped the waste over the rail—"he tells me that I've got to cut down. Talks about my heart and wind being bad. They've been nothing to brag of for thirty years, but so far as I can see, begad, I'm likely to outlast the man that gives me the advice."

Jack waited patiently while he lighted his cigar and tasted the first fragrant mouthful.

"You asked how I happened to find you?" his uncle resumed. "Well, in the end it was through this gentleman here." He nodded sidewise at Sam Levine.

"But Sam never knew me as anything but Jack Garrett."

"I see you've got to have the whole story," his uncle said. "So here goes. For almost five years you were hopelessly lost. I tried every way I knew how to locate you. Your old uncle, Jack, isn't so far gone but that he understood why you pulled out, and if you'd only had the sense to come and talk it over with me everything would have been all right. I might have blown off some steam, but I've never been hard on you, boy. Isn't that so?"

"Indeed it is, Uncle Lawrie. I was a fool," Jack repented.

"Yes, you were—but never mind that now. Well, along last March, or may be April, that silly young ass, Derry Travers, came up to me at the club—never ought to have been elected, and I told the membership committee so—and said he had seen you the night before. It seems Travers has the vicious habit of going to prize-fights, a thing no gentleman does. He had the audacity to say he'd seen you everlastingly pounded at one of those sinks of depravity."

"What is that is a what you call it?" demanded Levine, awakening to the fact that his profession was being slandered.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Levine. I forgot myself," exclaimed Mr. Follansby readily. "Purely private views, I assure you. Well, naturally I knew Travers was lying, so I hunted up this gentleman for the sake of proving it. Conceive of my astonishment, Jack, when what I learned from him led me to suspect Derry Travers might have been telling the truth after all. I looked up your navy record—there were your first two names, date of enlistment corresponding with the time of your disappearance, and all that.

"The next time I saw Mr. Levine he had dug up a photograph, and I saw at once that it was my scapegrace nephew. But you had vanished again, more completely than before. It quite threw me off my feed, Jack, to have been so near finding you and missing. You young villain, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"I am, uncle," Jack admitted, laying a hand on the other's knee. "But go on. I don't see even yet—"

"How I caught up with you at last? Through our good friend, Mr. Levine here. I got a letter from him yesterday, took the first train, caught the boat, and here I am at my time of life without a man to see to me, and very likely with a touch of gout coming on. Now, what have you got to say for yourself?"—

"Not a thing except that I am still ashamed and as sorry as I can be to have made you so much trouble, uncle," Jack replied.

His uncle looked on him fondly.

"Since it's all ended so well, you young rascal, never mind," said he. "We will get you into some respectable clothes and start all over again. I will even try to swallow my disgust at learning that you had turned prize-fighter for a time—a brutal occupa-

tion, Jack, as you know perfectly well —fit only for the dregs—"

"Wait a minute—wait," interrupted Sam Levine. "Prob'ly you don't know that I got feelings same as anybody else."

"I beg your pardon, my dear sir—I really do," cried Jack's uncle profusely. "I forgot myself again. We'll not mention prize-fighting again."

"Mebbe that's all right, and mebbe it ain't." Sam was by now thoroughly aroused. "And mebbe I got something to say, too."

The two men turned toward him, wondering what was coming. His manner was portentous.

"Jack," said the manager, "what would you say to squaring your record by going against the champ August 15?"

CHAPTER XXI.

UNCLE LAWRIE'S ULTIMATUM.

BEFORE Jack had recovered from his first wonderment as to the significance of the question, his uncle, Lawrence Follansby, was on his feet. His face was flushed with anger, and his well-nourished neck swelled like a turkey gobbler's.

"What do you mean, sir?" he demanded. "Are you insinuating that my nephew, John Garrett Follansby, could be induced to enter an arena and fight some low-browed ruffian with his fists? After your kindness, Mr. Levine, I am loath to believe you are intentionally insulting, but—"

"Wait a minute, uncle," urged Jack, rising also and slipping an arm around his shoulders. "Sit down again and give Mr. Levine a chance. It's going to rain, and we'd better go inside. After all, you know, it wouldn't be a virgin experience of the ring."

The older man allowed himself to be guided into the house, but after he was established continued to glare truculently at Sam. The latter, no whit abashed, repeated his inquiry.

"Should I not ask a question if I have one?" he inquired. "Let me tell you something that mebbe you didn't think of already.

"Suppose I wanted Jack here to fight." He directed his declaration at the senior Follansby. "Suppose I told it you that when I found again where he was, I would let you know.

"But I didn't need to let you know right off, did I? I could have waited a month or two. Then, after I had got out of him what I wanted, it would have been time to keep my promise, wouldn't it? Say, when did you get a letter from me?"

"Yesterday," the elder Follansby replied, wondering what the manager was driving at.

"That's it. I just heard it Sunday that Jack was here. You see?"

Uncle Lawrie was still some distance from seeing. Jack did, however, and nodded. A little spark of desire was lighting in his bosom. Was it possible he could have a chance to retrieve?

"I know, Sam," he said. "You think you might have held back, but you couldn't. Your conscience wouldn't let you."

"My conscience I don't know. However, I did as I said. Nobody can tell me I didn't. Now I ask you, Jack, would you fight?"

"For the championship? Next month?" cried Jack, with sparkling eyes.

"Sure. For the belt. You can pull it down, too, Jack, barring accidents. Of course, a man might always run his jaw against a stiff arm jolt, but we don't figure to. What do you say?"

"He says—" Uncle Lawrie began ponderously. Jack stopped him.

"Forgive me, uncle. This is my business. Let me handle it."

"But, for Heaven's sake, Jack," the other said, "you can't be seriously entertaining any idea of fighting in public for money? Why, the thing's un-

heard of—that is, of course you have fought, but I am trying to forget that. Think of it, Jack—think of the old Follansby name, of your father and mother, God bless them, of—"

"It was my father who taught me the first principles of sparring," the youth reminded him.

"Yes, yes, I know. But that was different. Your father, perhaps, would have been alive to-day if he hadn't gone in so much for athletics. I always did say too much exercise would break down the finest constitution."

"Still, he was killed in a railroad accident. But never mind. I want to hear what Sam has to say. I thought you had signed Butch Horlock for that match, Sam?"

The elder Follansby subsided, but with a scowl of protest. He looked insufferably bored as well as angry.

"Should I take a second-rater if I could get a first-class fighter?" Levine retorted in his best style of argument. "Didn't I see you and Butch Sunday? As I told you coming over, you are not so fast as you were, but two weeks with a trainer will bring you back. You are stronger, and you are at weight. I guess it—"

Jack nodded that his guess was right.

"But Butch?" he reminded.

"Butch is not matched. There were reasons why I left it open to the last minute. Him I never liked. He has courage, yes, and he is a pretty good fighter without brains. Besides, he is a crook, and a crook is never a first-class fighter."

"Why do you say he is a crook?" Jack asked.

"Didn't he dope you?" said Sam. "He wanted to be sure to win. You didn't know about that, did you?"

"Of course I did. But how did you find out?"

"Vesta Dawn," Sam replied. "If you knew, why didn't you say so?"

"Because—well, I wasn't dead sure just then. And I wouldn't have put up a squeal if I had been."

"So I says," Sam resumed as if there had been no interlude, "that if he was crooked in one fight, might be he would try it again and get me also in bad. I took him because I could find no better, and Reilly's manager promised me a fight."

"And you mean—"

"That if you will fight you shall have a chance at the champion."

"Preposterous! Out of the question!" snorted Lawrence Follansby.

Jack rose from his chair and stretched out his arms. The thought of battle shot a thrill to his very finger tips. Your true fighting man never loses his appetite for physical encounter, chest to chest and eye to eye.

Just so the race-horse delights to match his strength and fleetness on the track; the football-player associates with crisp autumn days the smell of sweat-soaked moleskins and creak of straining bodies. Pride in courage, strength and skill—that is all.

"Butch Horlock give out that you had a yeller streak, Jack," said Sam insinuatingly.

"A yellow streak? Does he think so since Sunday?"

"Your reputation was clean up to that fight with him," Sam added.

"Reputation!" Uncle Lawrie thought it time to assert himself. "The reputation which comes from being pounded to a jelly, or pounding somebody else! Associating with a lot of pluguglies—"

"They're not, Uncle Lawrie," Jack interrupted. "Most of them are very decent fellows. They have to be to stay in the game. Dissipation and prize-fighting don't mix. I ought to know."

"Your remarks do not at all tally with my information," said the older man. "I am informed by my friends at the club that fighters are a low, vulgar lot of men who are always intoxicated when not in the ring, and frequently when they are. But that is neither here nor there. I shall not give my consent to any such plan as Mr. Levine proposes."

Sam started to say something, changed his mind, and left the issue with Jack. The latter was at a loss as to the best manner of presentation.

An echo of a taunt rang in his ears. "Nobody loves a loser." He had quit the ring a loser.

Since then he had been consistently true to his resolution of success. His judgment told him he had justified himself as a member of Captain Zed's fishing gang. He wanted to go back of that and repair earlier errors.

His uncle resumed the proclamation of his views regarding fights and fighters. Jack turned to the window and, with his arm on the sash, looked out while he sought for the honest answer to the problem.

While they had talked the thunderheads had spread across the whole sky. Now, with a vivid flash of lightning, the downpour began. The old farmhouse seemed to rock under the assault of the elements.

Jack was hardly more conscious of this riot of nature than of his uncle's voice behind him. Ought he to fight, or ought he not to fight? Was his duty to his uncle in this matter? Or did he owe it to himself to retrieve as far as he could past mistakes?

He knew that Sam Levine was not only sincere, but correct, in calling him a better fighting machine at present than he had ever been before. Never by any possibility could he be more fit than at this moment. His supple muscles were tougher even than when he was in the navy, his powers of endurance were greater.

Of course he would not consider returning to the ring for any length of time. But just for one fight, just for the sake of straightening his record. Sam said he could whip Monk Reilly. Whether he could or not, there would be the satisfaction of honest endeavor; and defeat, if it came, would not be ignominious. He had betrayed himself and his manager for the last time.

He was recalled by his uncle.

"Jack," Mr. Follansby was saying, "let us end this discussion without more talk. The proposal Mr. Levine makes is ut-ter-ly out of the question. I am surprised that it should have been offered after he found out who you were."

"Wait a minute, uncle," the young man replied. "This is an important question, not to be settled out of hand. Let me point out a few facts you are unfamiliar with.

"In the first place, if I could do anything for Sam here it would only be paying him back a little on account of what he has done for me. He hunted me up at the close of my term of enlistment, when the chances were fair that I would have recommenced my old, reckless way of living—hunted me up and gave me a purpose in life. To your view it is not a very high purpose, but we don't all think alike.

"Of course, as Sam himself would be the first to say—has said to me, in fact—it was a straight business proposition. He cared nothing as to what became of me. But that does not weaken the fact that he came to my aid when I needed him.

"Also, he always played perfectly fair and square with me. He doesn't know any other way. And I, I am ashamed to say, was not on the level with him."

"What are you talking about?" demanded his uncle. Jack recited the story of his departure from the path of training through Vesta Dawn's lures.

"Pshaw—nonsense. Only a bit of youthful folly. Quite excusable," puffed Mr. Follansby.

"I lost it five thousand dollars on that fight," Sam put in rather plaintively.

"You see?" Jack resumed. "I owe him something for that, don't I? He says I'm a better man than Butch Horlock, and I am. Whether I can whip Reilly or not remains to be seen. But there are the facts. What is my duty in the premises?"

"Your duty? Your duty?" the

older man repeated. "You a Follansby and ask your duty in a matter of associating with a gang of toughs and rowdies or coming home with me to your proper place as a gentleman? You must be crazy."

"Nevertheless it isn't quite as clear to me as that," Jack returned.

"How much would you make out of that fight if John won?" the other asked of Levine.

"Mebbe eight or ten thousand dollars, mebbe not so much. Why?" Sam inquired cautiously.

"Get me pen and ink and I'll give you a check this minute for ten thousand. Great Heavens, how that thunder rattles! We'll settle this matter right away. Well, why don't you stir?"

Sam had only sagged a little deeper into his chair.

"For why should I want your ten thousand dollars?" he retorted. "I am a business man. I can earn my own money. Shouldn't I take a pride in my business like yourself?"

Jack Garrett was proud of Sam at that moment. He knew that money formed the strongest appeal which could have been made to him. Yet here he was refusing a check with Lawrence Follansby's name at the bottom of it as indifferently as if it had been a cabbage leaf.

"That's not fair, uncle," he said. "Give Sam credit for being just as independent as you, or any of us. Why shouldn't I accept his offer to fight for the championship?"

"I refuse to discuss the matter farther," said his uncle. "I am deeply grieved to find you in this stubborn mood, Jack, for all the world like your father before you. Besides that, this cursed thunder is giving me a headache.

"Here is my ultimatum. Come back with me and we will resume the old footing. I haven't many years left, my boy, and there's nobody but you to carry on the old name and business. They both need you, Jack, and so do I.

"And I need you, uncle," Jack replied, moved by his appeal.

"But I cannot consent that you should consider this absurd proposal to engage in a fist fight any longer. Forget it, I say, and come with me, or accept it and pass out of my life. There is your choice."

"You—you'd better do as he says, Jack," Sam advised faintly.

While the young man stood undecided hurrying feet sprang on the piazza. The door of the room to which the men had betaken themselves for refuge from the storm was thrown open. A young man quite obviously of island turnout stood on the threshold.

"They told me down t' th' cove that a feller named Jack Garrett had come up here," he exclaimed interrogatively.

"What is it?" Jack asked, stepping forward.

"Are you Jack Garrett?" Assent being indicated, he went on:

"Miss Hooper's down to my house, and said t' find you and have you hurry along there with somebody named Butch Horlock. Right away. It's all-fired important."

CHAPTER XXII.

AT THE LEEDY HOUSE.

CAPTAIN ZED had decided to quit Barratry on the first of August. The fishing was getting worse and worse. The only catch of consequence being made in near-by waters at present was of swordfish, which were taken with a lance. Not being equipped for this kind of work, he felt it was waste of time and money to remain longer.

Already one trap and the pound had been taken up and were drying on the tufted grass behind the beach. There would be work for all hands in getting gear into shape for putting away against another season. With luck the remaining trap would pay wages.

Thanks to the providential school of mackerel, it had turned out a more

than average profitable season. Also it was highly gratifying that the hostility of the islanders had been turned into diplomatic intercourse, if not actual friendship.

Buck Potter, the most implacable enemy of all, was avowedly a pro-foreigner, although that was of less account to Captain Zed than the fact that he had been able to win recognition of his rights in his fishing outfit on Barratry. With that white elephant off his hands, he could carry on his business from the mainland another season with a mind at rest.

On the day after the naval engagement at her grandfather's pound, Jessica had taken it into her head to walk to Oldham. She was inspired to this partly by the feeling of truce in the air, which guaranteed her against annoyance, and more by a desire to get away from the eulogies Captain Zed felt inclined to pay to Jack Garrett.

"I tell ye, Jess," he said, "'tain't every barge hand'd risk his life to get out a man that was tangled up in a pound net. 'Specially a feller like Buck Potter. It's something I wouldn't like to have to do myself."

"Nonsense, grandfather," she retorted. "There isn't a man in the gang, from you down to Jim Tarkis, that would have hesitated, and you know it as well as I do."

"Mebbe so," he admitted grudgingly. "But anyway, he's th' one that done it, ain't he? You got to give him credit for that."

Her knowledge that it was, in truth, necessary to give him credit for that was powerless to render the fact more palatable. She was trying to think about Jack Garrett as little as possible. In time she might be able to erase him altogether from her memory.

Thus she tried to deceive herself. Yet each day her heart was sorer, her wound more raw. This Jack Garrett, unknown waif she had rescued from a hungry sea and set on his feet, had treated her as a light of love. It was hard to forget.

The approaching storm warned her that it was time to return. She set out briskly, but the tempest broke ere she had covered a third of her journey.

To such an outdoor girl as Jessica Hooper, thunder, lightning, and torrential rains were void of terror. She hesitated for a moment, considering whether it were better to seek shelter or continue through the downpour. The nearest dwelling, a farmhouse, stood half a mile down the road. The storm had burst so suddenly that she was drenched to the skin in a moment.

There was nothing to be gained by hunting a protective roof now, so she shrugged her shoulders, laughed a little, and bent her head to the gale.

The warring clouds seemed to center over the island. Heaven's artillery was rallied for a cannonade. Peals of thunder succeeded one another in a continuous chorus punctuated by earsplitting crashes.

On the heels of one such outburst a woman's scream quite close at hand broke on Jessica's ears. She looked around in surprise, unable to determine whence it came.

At the moment she was exactly abreast of what Barratry Islanders know as the old Pelkey place. A farmhouse had stood here once, twenty feet back from the highway. Only its cellar hole was left to mark the site. In what had been the front yard were a half dozen decaying maples, of themselves a landmark on a coast where trees are scarce.

The shriek Jessica heard originated, she decided, in the front yard of the Pelkey place. She entered through the gap where once a gate had swung, and behind the remnants of the fence, overgrown with vines, found a woman lying flat on the ground, her face hidden in her hands.

"What is the trouble?" Jessica inquired, laying a hand on her shoulder.

The woman shuddered, but kept her face hidden. She was trembling violently. She spoke again, but the only response was a long, quivering groan.

It was clear enough that the stranger was mad with fear. Jessica placed her immediately as a summer visitor to Barratry. She was a girl of her own age, to judge from the rear view, fancifully dressed in the extreme mode, her finery now all draggled and dripping.

"Come, you can't stay here," Jessica urged. "You must get to shelter. There's nothing to be afraid of."

The woman only crouched closer, huddling herself together as if hoping thus to escape the attack of the heavens. Between her groans she mumbled, repeating over and over again what seemed to be a name, yet so indistinctly that her would-be rescuer was unable to catch it.

Jessica looked around helplessly. No, there was no roof nearer than that of the farmhouse, still a quarter of a mile away. She must take the affair into her own hands, for the girl was absolutely helpless. Before employing physical force she made a final appeal.

"Get up and come with me," she ordered. "The thunder won't hurt you. Come and let me take you to a house."

The derelict remained as before, still trembling, still shutting her eyes to her surroundings, if anything contracting to even smaller compass. Jessica was stirred to action.

She slipped her arm around the girl and, exerting all her young strength, set her on her feet. The other suffered this blindly, like one whom fright has rendered insensible to all else.

Something familiar about the figure in her clasp struck Jessica. Instantly the memory returned of where she had seen this person before. It was the girl of Jack Garrett's Sunday morning rendezvous nine days before.

She had seen her only briefly then, and at a distance, but her feminine intuition made recognition positive. A feeling of injury and antagonism arose within her.

It was of short endurance, the plight of the other being so pitiable as to drown any meaner emotion than compassion. Having lifted the stranger to her feet, she tried to get her to walk.

"You must try, you must try," she pleaded. "It's only a little way. There's nothing to be afraid of. The storm will soon blow over and the sky will be blue again. I am trying to help you — to get you to shelter. I am Jessica Hooper. What is your name?"

She thought thus to recall the paralyzed mind from its panic fear, but the effort was fruitless. The girl's moaning continued, with now and again a stifled shriek at some rattling explosion overhead. Her rescuer gave up the attempt to redeem her charge from the mental numbness which enchained her.

Fortunately she was very strong, even for a girl who had led the outdoor, active life which had been hers. Sailing, swimming, skating, and walking had been her pastimes since her earliest memory, with never an intermission to allow muscles to relax. The benefits of this life stood her in good stead now.

If she could once get the girl started she could trust a little to habit to keep her feet moving. This program entailed at the outset half carrying, half dragging, until they were in the highway. All this time the helpless product of the city hid her eyes from the elemental demonstration which had reduced her to this state.

Once in the road, progress was a little easier. Even at that, Jessica wondered afterward how she managed to get the limp creature to the door of the farmhouse.

She was unacquainted with its occupants, even with their names, but she knew the free hospitality of the country would be extended. Never was a more welcome sight than the kind-faced woman who let them in, throwing her whole weight against the

door to close it to the following tempest.

"For the land's sake, you are wet!" was the latter's greeting. "Come right through to the kitchen. There's nothing there that your drip-water 'll harm. Is your friend sick or hurt or anything?"

She ushered them into the clean, roomy kitchen, where Jessica deposited her burden on a rocker which the good woman drew up to the wood fire. Then she answered her hostess's question.

"She isn't my friend," said she. "I found her crouching on the ground under some trees a quarter of a mile to the eastward."

"The Pelkey place," said the farm woman, nodding.

"She looks like a city girl, probably a summer boarder," Jessica went on. "The storm has driven her out of her mind."

The other gave the stranger a moment of close scrutiny. A look of sudden understanding crossed her face.

"Oh, the poor thing — the poor, poor creature!" she exclaimed. "We must get those wet clothes off and put her to bed. I'll send Henry for the doctor straight off."

Her matronly survey of the stranger had perceived that which had escaped Jessica's less sophisticated eyes. Now the girl also looked and comprehended. Her mind leaped like a flash to the only possible conclusion.

The demands of humanity, however, outweighed every other consideration at the moment, and under the housewife's efficient directions she was extremely busy for the next half-hour. By the time the city girl had been put into a clean, dry bed, warmed with flat-irons, the doctor was at hand He excluded everybody from the room while he made his examination.

He came out looking very grave.

"She's beginning to show glimmerings of sense," he told them. "But the fright she's had was the worst possible thing for a woman in her condition. She keeps calling for somebody named Horlock — Butch Horlock as near as I can make out. It's a man, I should say, and there's one man ought to be with her now. Who is he?"

The farm woman—Mrs. Leddy as she introduced herself — shook her head.

"Likely some of those city boarders," said one. "Nobody that lives on Bar'try, anyway. Her husband, poor thing!"

Jessica ransacked her memory to recall where she had heard the name before. Fully expecting the doctor to name Jack Garrett, the fact that another man was demanded in the case encouraged her. She presently remembered that once she had heard the name of Butch Horlock.

It had been on the Sunday morning, only nine days ago, which seemed now in another era. Jack Garrett had spoken the name, and it had been applied to the man who had attacked her on the cliffs road.

"I know who he is," she said. "At least, I have seen him. But I don't know anything more about him."

"He ought to be here," the doctor repeated. "There's no doubt of that in my mind. If he's this woman's husband—"

"Wait," Jessica interrupted. "Perhaps we can get him. One of my father's men may know."

It was then that Mrs. Leedy's son was sent out into the rain on another errand. At the cove he found the Hooper gang clustered in the bunkhouse like ducks avoiding a shower. Harley Whaley told him Jack had departed with a city feller named Levine, who had called for him, and was living this summer in the Farnsworth house. Thither Henry sped at his best gait.

Considering everything, the hour and a half from Jessica's arrival at the Leedy home which brought Jack and Butch Horlock, with Sam Levine puffing

along, to the scene was fast time. There had been a little delay, too, in getting the Butcher started. It was effected at last through Sam's sharp order, Jack, knowing that Jessica would have had sufficient reason behind her urgent summons, although totally unable to guess its meaning, having made strong representations.

Jessica met them with a finger at her lips.

"I'm so glad you've come," she said softly. "She's quieter now, but she keeps calling one name."

"Wot's it all about?" demanded Horlock.

"She says her name is Vesta Dawn," Jessica explained. "The doctor got that much out of her."

"Vesta here? Well, what of it?" the Butcher insisted.

"Come in and I'll tell you all about it." The girl led the way to the kitchen. The doctor was out there, and his grave, professional manner took the edge off the fighter's surliness. Jessica explained the nature of Vesta's scare.

Where she laid down the story the physician took it up.

"You're Mr. Horlock, are you?" he asked. "Are you this young woman's husband?"

"Me? We're—well, we're goin' to get married," the Butcher admitted. He was beginning to feel alarmed by the serious atmosphere of the place. "What is it to you?"

"Nothing, my friend; not a thing," the doctor returned. "My only interest in the matter is to do what I can for my patient. Her condition is very alarming. The fright she has undergone this afternoon is the worst possible thing that could have happened."

"Yuh don't mean that Vesta's real sick?" Butch protested.

"She is face to face with the mystery of death," the doctor declared. "The next twelve hours will tell the story. The shock of her experience has hastened a crisis ahead of its time."

His meaning was unmistakable, even to Butch Horlock. His face went ashen gray as he muttered:

"Good Gawd!"

"She may come through," the doctor went on. "The event hangs on a hair. But between now and morning she goes down into the valley of death. And since I came she has given no name but yours."

To the utter astonishment of Jack Garrett and Sam Levine, Butch Horlock suddenly broke down. Tears filled his eyes. He dashed them aside with a dab of his coat-sleeve and said chokingly:

"Th' poor kid! Say, doc, kin I see her?"

"She must not be excited," the physician replied, with little encouragement in his voice. "What she needs above everything to meet her ordeal is an unruffled mind."

"Doc, I got to see her," Butch pleaded. "You got to let me. She asked for me, didn't she? Aw, say, doc—"

His voice broke again. The doctor studied him from behind his thick spectacles.

"You say you were going to marry her," he spoke after a moment's silence, during which the Butcher's eyes hung on his expression. "You ought to have married her long before this, as you know perfectly well."

"Dat's right, doc; dat's right," Horlock confessed. "You can't say a t'ing dat ain't true. But say, doc, I've been busy."

"Too busy to marry the girl you ought to marry?"

"'Tain't that, but—say, doc, I'm in bad. I know I ain't done right. But say, I love dat kid, doc. There's no two ways about it. I'd ought to have married her before dis. What if anything should happen to her to-night—say, doc, they won't, will they?"

He was clutching at the doctor's coat-sleeve in his eagerness. The two witnesses of the scene felt themselves stirred to the seconding of his appeal.

"No man can say that," the physician returned. "She wants to see you —that is why I had you brought here. But she shall not see you unless you are willing to do now, at the extreme moment, what you should have done months ago."

"D'you mean marry her, doc?"

"That is what I mean. And I will take the liberty to add that it might mean to this young woman the difference between life and death."

"Why, say, doc, that's what I been tryin' to get at," Butch declared without an instant's hesitation. "Sure I want to marry her. Th' poor kid, here alone widout any of her folks! Now kin I see her, doc?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

JACK DECIDES.

DURING the night the rain ceased and the stars looked out. Jack, stepping to the kitchen door, cocked an eye aloft.

"A fair day ahead, Butch," he proclaimed.

The other occupant of the kitchen stopped in his restless promenade for a moment. During the night they had passed together there had been little conversation between them. Jack, sympathizing with his companion's state of mind, had done his best to cheer the other. But the Butcher, who had perhaps never known what it was to be afraid for himself, was in a state of complete funk.

It was of the girl he was thinking, of Vesta Dawn, who had become his wife before dark on the previous day. For the thousandth time he began:

"D'you t'ink, Jack—"

"It's all right, I tell you. Worrying isn't going to help any. She's in good hands."

The Butcher subsided into a rocking-chair, his chin on his breast. The women were busy with the doctor at the other end of the house. Mrs. Leedy's Henry was happily sleeping, oblivious to these strange happenings. Sam had returned to training-camp on assurances that he was more of a hindrance than help in the circumstances.

Jack lifted the stove-lid and threw in a stick of wood. The range fire had been kept alive all night for the heating of water, and the temperature of the kitchen, despite the open door and windows, was that of a Turkish bath. Neither of the men appeared to notice it, however.

The clatter of the iron lid aroused Horlock from his abstraction. He started to speak, hesitated, and then impetuously unburdened his mind.

"Say, Jack, you're a better man dan what I am," he began. "You been white to me t'-night, an' I want to say dat I know it. I ain't so tough but what I know when a guy's square wid me."

"That's all right, Butch," Jack returned, glad nevertheless to have the subject diverted from that other which during the long watch had worn on his nerves.

"I done you dirt, old man," Butch went on. "Dat last fight we had at d' Athens Athletic Club—it wasn't on de square, see? You was doped."

"I know all about that," Jack told him. "Forget it now."

"I'm goin' to tell Sam Levine about that," the Butcher insisted stoutly. "I told some folks you had a yeller streak, Jack. I knew 'twa'n't so when I said it. I'm sorry now.

"But I'm goin' to tell Sam Levine how I swung it into you about that fight. An' I'm goin' to tell him somethin' else. I'm goin' to tell him how you handed it to me day before yest'day, and that you're a better man to meet the champ than what I am."

"I wouldn't do that, Butch," Jack said. "What's the use?"

"Becoz he'll put you up against the champ 'stead of me," Horlock explained. "You c'u'd trim Monk Reilly. And Sam'll take you back after what I tell him. All I ask, Jack, is that you keep me on for sparrin'

pardner. I kin do you some good that way. You been awful white to me."

Jack hardly knew how to reply. The softening effect of the situation on Butch Horlock had been increasingly in evidence during the night.

The spectacle of Vesta Dawn, her white, pain-twisted face smiling faintly at him, had won through his rough crust. His nearness to the tremendous issues of life and death had served to dissipate his hardihood. His swelled head had shrunk by contrast of its true insignificance.

Before Jack could frame an answer the hall door swung open and the doctor, in shirt-sleeves, with cuffs rolled back, came in. He advanced toward the Butcher with outstretched hand. The other man shrank back, hardly daring to trust the message he read in the physician's face.

"What — what's de verdict, doc?" he whispered.

The doctor grasped his hand.

"My congratulations, Mr. Horlock," said he. "You are the father of a fine, healthy boy."

"And de kid—Vesta—how is she?" the Butcher asked hoarsely.

"The mother is doing very well indeed," was the reply. "She went to sleep happy and comfortable. If no complications set in—and there is no reason to fear any — she will be all right."

"Thank Gawd!" came from Horlock with a ring of sincerity, which went farther than anything else to show Jack that in his way he really loved the girl. "A boy, you say, doc?"

"Yes, a fine boy."

"Say, is he — is he a white hope, d'you t'ink? Or is he in th' bantam class?"

"A feather-weight just now, I should say," laughed the doctor, who had not lost all his college knowledge of ring terms. "But with the right handling he'll be a comer — yes, distinctly a comer, I should say."

When he had gone Jack added his own congratulations. Horlock was just beginning to reach a realizing sense of his dignities. From deepest depression his mood altered gradually to the heights of exultation.

"A boy, Jack!" he cried, pounding his companion on the back until his shoulders ached. "What do you t'ink, hey? Wait till I teach him how to put up his mitts. Th' old man 'll be a hasbeen then, but th' kid 'll be just comin'. Oh, man—"

A half-hour later, when gray dawn had changed to broad daylight, Jack took a turn out in the yard. There was nothing he could do, but he stuck to his post until discharged. Rounding the corner of the house, he found Jessica on the doorstep.

She, too, had felt the strain of the night. It was written in circles of weariness under her eyes and the droop of her square, proud shoulders. Jack mastered with difficulty a great desire to take her in his arms.

"Good morning, sentinel," she greeted him, with a tired smile. "I am always finding you doing night patrol."

"It seems to be all I'm good for," he replied. "Won't you catch cold out here like this?"

"I hadn't thought of it. Is it cold? No, I guess not."

He invited himself to a seat on the step below her. She drew her skirts aside to make room. The position reminded both of their first meeting, when he had sat with his wrenched arm across her knees in the little Polly Ann, and later had slept with his curly head on her lap. But neither voiced the recollection.

"Jess," he said, "there's something I must say to you. It seems that somehow I've been unfortunate enough to have offended you. I don't know just how. Ever since that night —that night on the fish-house dock—"

A soft hand extended from behind closed his lips.

"Let me tell my story, Jack," said

the girl. "No, don't look at me. I can tell it just as well if you keep your eyes the other way."

In lieu of looking at her, he took the hand which had interrupted his speech. She allowed it to lie in his, resting on his shoulder.

"I'm—I'm ashamed to confess it, Jack," she said softly. "I was jealous."

It took a half-minute for the force of the admission to seep into his fatigue-poisoned brain. Then its meaning reached him. And then—she was in his arms, her lips to his.

"Jessica!" he cried softly. "You were jealous! Why, dear?"

This after that first embrace, which needed no answered question. Both hands were his now, and her face looked into his with shy pride.

"Why were you jealous?" he repeated when she hesitated to reply. "Of whom? I don't understand."

"It was silly of me, Jack—unpardonable," she admitted. "Of that girl in there."

"Vesta Dawn—Mrs. Horlock, I mean?" he said, more mystified than ever. "Why, what do you mean, darling? How could you have been jealous of her?"

His mind flew back to that old relationship which had been severed consequent on his last disastrous ring appearance. Jessica could not have heard of that.

"Do you remember a week ago last Sunday, Jack?" she asked, burying her face on his shoulder.

"A week ago Sunday—yes."

"When you went for a walk along the cliff road?"

"And interrupted Butch Horlock. I remember. He paid for his indiscretion."

"Before you interrupted him. Farther on—you and a girl—"

A light broke.

"Vesta Dawn—I remember," he cried. "Was it that?"

"Is it proper for young men to put their arms around girls they meet beside the highway, as you did around her?" she demanded primly. "I happened to see you. That was what made me jealous."

"But, Jess," he began, the scene returning.

"Oh, it's all right now," she broke in. "The girl herself told me all about it to-night. I forgive you this time, Jack, but don't ever, ever let it happen again."

A little later he began an interlude of conversation.

"You remember, Jess dear, how you picked me out of the ocean like a piece of driftwood?"

"I remember."

"And I told you afterward that my name was Jack Garrett? But you don't really know who I am even now. Don't you think you ought to, considering—well, considering?"

"What difference?" she sighed happily. "Besides, the girl in there told me. She said you were a fighter. I ought to have been very much shocked at that, but I wasn't, really."

"That is partly true. I have been a fighter. I have been a sailor, too, as I told you. I have been other things. Do you want to hear?"

"If you want to tell me. And after you are all through it won't have made any difference. Do you truly love me, Jack?"

"You know I do."

"Then it wouldn't make any difference to you who I was, would it? Nor does it make any difference to me who or what you are. To me you are just—just you. What more is there to it?"

He insisted, nevertheless, in laying bare the story of his life. She heard him through without comment, from the revelation of his connection with the house of Follansby, of which she was totally ignorant, down to the latest chapter which included the invitation to return to the ring. When he had finished she kissed him, saying:

"It isn't so very terrible, after all.

Now that you've told me, it seems as if I had always known everything. That's because I understand you so well, Jack."

"You didn't a week ago Sunday—but never mind that. And you don't think any the less of me for having fought in the prize-ring?"

"Why should I as long as you fought fair? It isn't something to take up for a life-work, but it might be very good preparation. It wasn't the money alone you fought for, either, was it?"

"No, it wasn't the money. It was the joy of the game—the spirit of the sport—oh, I can't make you understand."

"You needn't try. I do understand."

Looking at her, he saw that she did. She could sympathize with a man's pride in strength and courage.

"By Jove, you do!" he ejaculated. "Then what do you think, Jess, of Sam Levine's offer to take me on for the championship match? Ought I to accept, or ought I, to oblige my uncle, refuse his proposition? Which way does duty lie?"

"It *is* hard," she agreed. "Your uncle thinks so much of you, and has done so much for you, that you ought to do almost anything he asks. You say you are all he has.

"On the other hand, he wouldn't want you if you were untrue to yourself. Isn't that the whole point—being true to yourself will make you true to others? Not whether Sam Levine wants you to fight, or whether your uncle doesn't want you to fight, but whether you should redeem your own reputation, and leave a clean record for the ring as you did in the navy and as you have done here on Barratry. That's what I should say."

In the girl's clear-headed presentment of a puzzling case the fogs of Jack Garrett's doubt were dissipated. He saw that he could not be true to himself and avoid the fight Sam Levine had offered him.

Whether or not he won made little difference, so long as he did his best. He would square his record, and then quit the ring for good. Once more the exultation in his fitness rose to his head like strong wine.

"There's coffee in the kitchen," announced the voice of Mrs. Leedy. "Better come drink it while it's hot. Doctor says you can go any time you like afterwards."

The difficult task of acquainting his uncle with the decision at which he had arrived troubled Jack as, in the late afternoon, he strolled in the direction of the Farnsworth House.

It was a pity that life should complicate itself like this. Why couldn't the old fellow have put off discovering him until he had wound up that phase of his career which was offensive to him?

Lawrence Follansby's intimation that he could consider himself severed from relationship in case he accepted Sam Levine's offer was the smallest consideration. He had shown that he could take care of himself, and he rather thought he could take care of two, without calling on his uncle for assistance.

On the other hand, he did truly hate to hurt the old fellow's feelings. Left an orphan in early boyhod, Uncle Lawrie had been father and mother, bearing with his childish shortcomings and the more serious scrapes of young manhood with wonderful patience. Now he was forced to go counter to his commands.

He was spared the ordeal he had dreaded. Sam Levine met him with heavy persiflage.

"I hear it that Butch Horlock is a husband and father," he chuckled. "Such a quickness! He tells me you were best man and I am to be godfather to a white hope. What would I be doing at a christening—ask me that?"

"It wouldn't hurt you any," Jack retorted. "Where's Uncle Lawrie?"

"He has gone already. A letter he left for you."

Jack opened and read:

> I am summoned back to New York to an unexpected directors' meeting. Sorry not to have seen you before I went. They told me you were called in on a baby case. I will put up anything you like, Jack, if you want to study medicine. A great many gentlemen go in for that profession.
>
> As for this other thing, of course you won't consider it farther. I told Levine what I thought of him for suggesting it. Thank God, a Follansby is always a gentleman. Join me in New York just as soon as you can get there.

That was all, but to the young man, with his intimate knowledge of his uncle's make-up, there was a message between the lines. It was unnecessary to state in so many words that acceptance of the proffered fight meant a permanent break, or Uncle Lawrie had suffered a change of nature.

"Did you see Butch?" he inquired as he folded up the missive.

"I couldn't help it. There was nothing else so big in sight," Sam replied. "He told me you had ought to have that fight with Reilly instead of him."

"What did you reply?"

"I says shouldn't I know it? It saved me telling the same thing to him if you would fight. All the same, if I was you, I wouldn't."

"Why wouldn't you?" Jack asked, surprised.

"Why should you fight when this old fellow, your uncle, who says something is a sink of iniquity—the ring or something, I dunno what—is all puffed up with money to spend on you if you don't fight? But it ain't my business to tell you what you should do."

"Do you still want me? Do you think I'm good enough to go against Reilly? You saw me last Sunday—what's the verdict?"

"I told you already. Butch Horlock he says he will be your sparring pardner. Two weeks, and you would be faster than you ever were. But you got to work."

"I'll do it," cried Jack.

"You'll fight? *Gott sei dank!*" Sam seemed on the verge of doing a joy-dance. With a returning sense of his responsibilities, however, he became suddenly grave.

"We must get to work," he announced. "Look over the house and choose for yourself a room. Tomorrow I must name the man who is to meet Reilly. We will fight at the Palladium Club in Jersey, where the laws are right, twenty-five rounds to a decision."

A memory of the obstacle to success in Jack's last fight gave him pause. He stopped midway of his plans to say:

"Jack, this Vesta Dawn—she ain't nothing to you no more, hey?"

"Go on, you old scandalmonger," laughed the young man, clapping him on the shoulder. "She's a married woman."

"All right," said Sam. "I just wanted to know. There ain't no harm asking, is there?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SAGA OF THE RING.

"In this corner, gentlemen," bellowed the announcer, "you see Professor Michael Reilly, also known as Monk Reilly, for three years unbeaten champion of his class. In that corner is Jack Garrett, better known to the ring as the Navigator. You know his record. They will fight twenty-five rounds, Marquis of Queensbury, and may the best man win."

A shout arose which shook the rafters of the lofty amphitheater. The great moment was at hand, thrilling climax of weeks of discussion, rumor, anticipation.

Through the preliminary bouts between young pugilists of little importance the tobacco-smoke had been gathering until now it filled the huge

enclosure like a thick fog. It hung in wreaths along the balconies, wafted to and fro by the exhalations of thousands of men and boys crowding the banked benches. It settled down into the pit, a veritable blue blanket, acrid, penetrating, obscurative, through which one dimly recognized an acquaintance although only a dozen seats away.

The biting fumes worked no abatement of the enthusiasm which greeted the two principal gladiators. Men might cough and choke, but yell they would, and did right heartily. Incidental discomforts were powerless to rob them of their pleasure.

The Navigator and Monk Reilly, who had arisen for the introduction, sat down again without acknowledging the greetings of the multitude by so much as a nod. Occupants of the balconies, far removed from the tiny battlefield, saw them as street figures are seen through a mist-obscured window, patches of white flesh picked out against the blue pall. None the less were they gladdened by the privilege of being present at an encounter of such consequence.

To the aristocracy of the ring following, in the expensive seats close to the scene of battle, it was given to comment familiarly on the contestants. Monk Reilly was inevitably the favorite.

"Still, Sam Levine don't pick many losers," grunted a paunchy, black-mustached individual, whose overlapping jowls suggested that, although an admirer of the athletic type, his own most strenuous exercise was in all likelihood lifting a whisky-glass from a polished table. "Say, I'd rather have his luck than a beer-keg full of diamonds."

"He sure can pick 'em," his neighbor rejoined. He had the rangy air of a Westerner, and his idiom was of the plains and the quartz-bearing hills. "Still, you can't never tell. Why, I was with Jim Jeffries the day before the fight, and he says—"

"Aw, Jim Jeffries," growled the paunchy one. "He cost me three thousand. If I met him I'd—"

"He says," persisted the Westerner, "'Ben,' says he, 'there's nothin' to it. They'll carry that dinge home in a market-basket,' he says. And see what Jack done to him."

"They don't come back," his companion quoted tersely, and fell into gloomy memories of a notable encounter.

The ringside seats were occupied by a mixed assemblage of sporting characters, men about town, old fighters, swells, and the other picturesque elements of this form of entertainment. The present rather than the past was the topic of interest with a trio of men in dinner-coats, whose crush hats were carefully balanced on their knees in deference to the demands of those behind.

"Monk looks a little fine, if you ask me," remarked one of this group. "Still, you can't tell. Those white-skinned fellows are deceptive."

"There's a story going around," replied another, "that the Navigator's manager, Levine, swapped horses for this fight at the last minute before he was called on to nominate his man. I heard he was going to name Butch Horlock. The Butcher, you know, got a decision over the Navigator a few months back. You were there, Derry?"

"I saw it," Derry admitted. "It was more than a decision—it was a knockout. If the Navigator doesn't frame up to-night any better than he did then, there's nothing to it at all. I'd never seen him fight before, but the other fellow had it all over him."

"Still, Derry, I like his looks well enough to double that bet at the same odds," said the first speaker. "What do you say?"

"You're on," the other rejoined briefly. "Now they're going to get to work."

Gloved, and wiser by the admonitions of the referee and the counsel

of their seconds, the men advanced to the center of the squared circle, exchanged a suspicious handclasp, and squared off. An incipient yell from the onlookers was swallowed, as with an effort, and several thousand pairs of eyes focused on the boxers.

Seen thus face to face, they presented an interesting study. Monk Reilly was the traditional fighting man. His hair was cropped, his ears set flat, his watchful eyes were round and small, and punishing blows had almost leveled his nose with his face. He suggested somehow a hard-bitten Irish terrier, alert, mettlesome, ignorant of fear.

He had been a fighter from the time he could toddle. He was born with the instinct and trained in the school of necessity. His first battle under ring rules had been with the bare fists, in the early morning before officers of the law were astir, when he had shown his gameness by pushing on to a draw after both eyes had been closed tight and he was forced to employ one hand to pull the swollen flesh apart so that he could see to hit with the other.

Between that and the winning of the championship there had been a long interval. He had never been able to match his pluck with cleverness. Sheer dogged resolution, however, had carried him at last to the top of the pile. He was thirty-three, a family man, and his leading ambition was to retain the title a couple of years longer, when he would have enough salted away to insure his wife and children against want and could retire to the easy life of a saloonkeeper.

To the wise ones there was a marked difference between the Jack Garrett who faced the champion, chest to chest and eye to eye, and that other Jack Garrett who, a few months earlier, had gone down under Butch Horlock's fist. Confidence was enthroned now where doubt sat then. He lacked a little of the height and reach of his opponent. On the other hand, he suggested greater strength, which in the long run might mean bottom—endurance—staying power. And he had ten years the advantage.

"Jim Jeffries says to me, says he—" began the Westerner. His paunchy friend interrupted.

"Can it," he ordered. "They're off!"

The loudly clanging bell gave the signal. Ere its vibrations had died away the battle began.

The champion, a little suspicious of his lasting powers, had planned to carry the fight to the challenger. His right arm shot out to the accompaniment of a shuddering "ah!" from the spectators.

The blow fell harmless. A fraction of a second quicker—but the Navigator, cautious and watchful, jerked his head and the glove whistled past his ear.

"Boy, could you ha' seen them! Our Jack, mind you—him that has fished alongside of us. An' all New York lookin' on, with I don't know how many from other parts. They were the game ones."

Herb Mann was telling his companions of the Hooper gang of the battle.

"I sat close to th' ring, where Jack had fixed for me to be. First off I thought 'twas make-believe—that was when they put on gloves, like a boat-sponge they were. How can they hurt anybody with those, says I.

"But 'twas fine th' way they looked in one another's eyes and you seen neither was scared of the other. They'd as quick have gone to work without them feather pillow things, if they were let. Feller next me says th' law wouldn't allow. He told me they could hit hard, all right, with th' boat-sponges. 'Tell that to a summer boarder,' I says.

"Th' old feller—th' champion—he whips one out at Jack. Quick he was, an' long an' slim, like a dogfish. A dogfish face he had on him, too, as I could see sittin' down there in th' amen

pew. He looked ugly an' snappin', but he didn't scare Jack any. He bent his head and struck out with his left.

"It hit — oh, boy! Way th' other feller grunted, I could see 'twa'n't any love tap. Caught him in th' ribs. I'd sooner do a day's work than stop one like that.

"And all th' time, mind you, there was Jack grinnin' like he was settin' down to a clam chowder. Feller next me said 'twas his fightin' face. Anyway, he seemed mighty pleased with himself. 'Jack, old boy,' I told myself, 'you didn't grin like that time you ripped Buck Potter loose from th' pound net.'

"Then I remembered 'twas just th' way he looked when Buck picked on him about takin' his skiff off th' beach day he rowed to New Galilee an' back. Sort of happy, you know, 's if Jim Tarkis was cookin' something for dinner he liked particular.

"By and by a bell rang an' they went an' sat down. Jack was laughin' an' talkin' to the feller in his corner—Irishman name of Mac. I could see that much for all th' feller standing in front of him wavin' a towel up and down. Then they jumped up an' went at it again.

"Seemed as if Jack was playin' safe all this time. He was just jigglin' th' bait to let th' other feller think he didn't mean any harm. All of a sudden he lets drive—cripes, what a larrup! It landed on th' side of the champion's face. I saw his head jerk back.

"He didn't mean, though, for Jack to get away with anything like that. He drove out at th' same time. He wiped Jack's nose with a sort of grazin' blow. It come to me they meant business, and that them boat-sponges on their hands could hurt. Jack's nose begun to bleed all over th' deck.

"'Twas then I first took notice of th' feller sittin' to starboard of me. He give a groan an' says, says he:

"'This is awful—awful! It must be stopped at once!'

"Of course, I didn't know what he was talkin' about, but I turned an' give him a look. Stout party with a boiled shirt showin' like the cockpit in a fresh painted yacht. He seemed pretty well worked up over something, but I was too busy then to pay notice.

"I didn't hear any more from him for quite some time. Four or five, mebbe six, rounds. Them two on th' deck was givin' and takin' about as much of one as t'other. 'Course, Jack didn't mind about his nose bleedin'. When it got bad he'd wipe it on th' back of his feather pillow, and by and by it stopped.

"The champion, that had started in so fierce, wasn't quite so anxious now. I see Jack was playin' him like you'd play a striped bass if you was out for th' fun of the thing—givin' him all th' line he'd take, and then reelin' up, and then givin' him some more, to sort of tire him so's't you could use the gaft-hook. You know what I mean.

"Prob'ly that wasn't th' way of it at all. Only that's th' way it looked t' me. I guess th' old admiral t' starboard of me had th' same idea; anyway, he had cheered up quite a good deal an' was talkin' to himself.

"All of a sudden Jack seems to make up his mind it was time t' use th' gaft. I thought he'd better play him. What d'you think? Before I knew what I was sayin' I yells out—an' all New York listenin', mind you—I yells, 'Play him, Jack! Let him run with it!'

"Soon's I heard my voice I knew I'd put my foot in it. I dropped back and tried to make myself small, same as a fiddler crab crawlin' under a stun on th' beach. I could feel th' old gent in th' next seat lookin' at me, reproachful. He didn't say nothing just then, though.

"That come a second later. For Jack, just 's if he hadn't heard me, lets drive an awful wallop. It come so fast I couldn't see. Th' champion was turned half 'round, and it caught him on th' back of th' head. He thumped down on th' deck like a full mackerel

kit droppin' from a donkey-engine h'ist.

"Then th' old codger in th' next cabin turns loose. He told me what I was for tryin' to interfere with an exhibition of manly skill an' courage. Told me I was sp'ilin' other people's fun, and if I couldn't stand it I'd better go home. Made me feel pretty small, you bet you, boy.

"After that knockdown I didn't think th' champion 'd ever get up to face Jack again. But when th' bell rings for th' next, there he was, cool and ugly as a sculpin. Then I saw somethin' had happened to Jack.

"His right arm was hooked up with th' thumb in th' belt of his britches. Yes, sir; it was clean dislocated at th' shoulder, just like you saw in th' papers. His right, mind you. An' he was bent on tryin' to finish with one arm.

"Mr. Levine, he told me afterward, he tried to get him to quit. So did his second. But Jack was stuffy about it, and said he'd stick as long as he could stand. When th' crowd found what was up, they gave a yell you could have heard clean over to Bar'try.

"Think of fightin' a championship with one hand! Just think of it! It was then th' old chap t' starboard got real excited.

"'It's a crime to let this brutal exhibition continue,' says he, turnin' my way. 'It's an outrage on humanity. I shall write to the newspapers about this.'

"He was real puffy and red in th' face about it. I tried to soothe him down.

"'You don't need to be worried about Jack Garrett,' says I. 'I know him, and I tell you he can take care of himself.'

"At that th' old fellow bristles up, and I cal'lated he was goin' to say something real saucy. But before he had a chance to rip it out there come a flaw that gibed him.

"Y'see, when th' champion saw 't Jack wasn't all there with both arms, he made up his mind he'd finish this thing up quick. So he waded in, twenty knots to th' hour.

"This was what Jack was countin' on more or less. He'd kept a weather eye out, lookin' for signs, so he knew what to expect. When t'other feller started to hurry up, Jack threw over his tiller, came about quick, and slid in a left-hander.

"Boy, I'll never say again you can't hit with one of them sponges. If that's th' way they work, I'd rather take my chances with th' crooked end of a boat-hook.

"It dropped anchor on th' long-armed chap right under his ear. Feller on my port said something about th' angle of the jaw, but I don't know how he could tell any better'n I could. Anyway, down goes th' champion again, hard as before.

"I guess 'twould have been all over now only that somebody called time, and in between rounds this Reilly feller had a chance to repair damages. 'Twas only a jury rig he could raise, though. I see when he come to th' scratch again he wa'n't th' same he had been. Jack see it, too.

"Th' old chap that called me down had changed his tune once more. He was all for lettin' it go on forever now. He told me confidential that his fondness for brutality was such he could stay there all right seein' Jack rip it into t'other chap.

"They'd fit fifteen rounds, an' then eighteen, and then twenty without much happenin'. Both were takin' things careful. Jack kep' on grinnin' all th' time, though, and I could hear him talkin' to t'other chap. 'Sorry to have to do it, old man,' says he, 'but I've got you licked and you know it. I'm just stallin' this way so's th' crowd'll have a good time.' 'Puttin' th' Indian sign on him,' feller on my left says.

"Seems like th' champion got to believin' him after a while. Every time Jack would start for him he'd dodge. That ain't sayin' he didn't land some

stiff ones on th' boy, too, for he did. I saw one crack that caught him plumb on his dislocated shoulder that I'd rather have lost a fare of fish than take. An' Jack kept on grinnin'.

"Come th' twenty-first round. Old party to starboard was gettin' restless again. 'The' police ought to interfere,' says he. I didn't make no answer because I'd just happened to notice Jack's jaw muscles tighten same as they used to in th' fishin'-boat when he had something hard and quick to do and was set on doin' it. And then it come.

"He was usin' his feet since his shoulder got put out, keepin' away from t'other feller that way. Quicker 'n a toad could wink he jumped in. His left glove lands in th' champion's stomach—right here. 'Solar plexus,' says th' man next me. Anyway, th' champion goes down. A man stood over him an' began countin'. He counted up to ten; th' champion tried to get on his feet, but couldn't any more'n a flounder can climb out of a high freeboard fish launch, an' 'twas all over.

"Yell! If you could have heard 'em! Th' old fellow that was so sharp to have th' police stop it yelled louder 'n any one else.

"Yes; then," the number one man concluded his saga—"then, after he'd won th' championship, he gave it back."

That was the sensation which stirred prize-ring circles to their depths. Confronting an unprecedented situation, understanding arrives of how completely we are governed by habit.

The newspaper writers were at a loss for words. Pugilistic authorities fell out over the consequent questions. Here was something which had never occurred before, and was likely not to occur again.

Yet it was a perfectly simple matter, and well understood between Jack and Sam Levine before the former entered the ring. Sam had assured him that, barring the unforeseen, he would win.

"Whether I do or not, Sam," Jack replied, "it's my last fight."

He remained permanently uncertain whether Sam was able to get his point of view, but that made no difference. At any rate, he knew what was meant.

So, after he had had his rub-down and dressed, he made his way to Monk Reilly's dressing-room. The defeated champion, although downcast, accepted his hand without rancor.

"One of us had to lose," he admitted. "You're a game one."

"Thanks, Monk," Jack returned. "I can say the same of you. What I came particularly for was to tell you I've fought my last ring fight."

"What?" almost yelled Reilly.

"My last ring fight," Jack repeated. "If I've won the championship, I give it back with the knowledge that it couldn't be in better, squarer hands."

"You're not going to fight any more? You're giving up the championship?"

The newspaper boys crowded in, and Jack told them of his decision. It was "a clean knockout," as one of them phrased it in his column the next day. But no amount of argument could shake Jack's determination.

CHAPTER XXV.

UNCLE LAWRIE.

"Old gink's been stickin' around sayin' he's got to see yuh," said Mac, breaking through the circle which pressed on Jack for an amplification of his statement. "I tried to shoo him off, but he w'u'dn't go. What shall I tell him?"

"Who is he?" Jack inquired.

"Sure, how w'u'd I know? He w'u'dn't give no name. I'll be after throwin' him into th' sthrate an' sp'ilin' his cast-iron shirt-front if yuh like."

"No; don't do that," Jack pleaded. "Perhaps he has feelings the same as you and I. Take him into my room, and I'll be along in a minute or so."

He broke away from the crowd as soon as the courtesies permitted. He wanted to get by himself somewhere to take stock of his happiness.

It was a great thing to have won this fight. He had sufficient excuse for feeling pleased with himself.

What a wonderful world this was, where matters turned out to one's desire!

His ring record was clean once more —clean and crowned by an action of unparalleled magnanimity. He could now go to Jessica with that mean sense of unworthiness washed from his conscience.

She should know him henceforth as John Garrett Follansby, not as Jack Garrett. No matter what his uncle said, he was as much a Follansby as the head of the house. He did wish, however, that the old man might have taken his own view of the demands of a delicate situation.

But even that pebble in his shoe would be unfelt when he was with Jessica again. He must wait a couple of days for the marks of battle to disappear, meanwhile permitting the doctor and massage artists to toy with his lame shoulder. Then for New Galilee and Jess.

By the way, he had forgotten to send her the wire he promised. He was almost out of the building, on his way to a telegraph-office, before he remembered that a caller awaited him in his dressing-room.

Turning back, he met Mac outside the door.

"Is the old party here, Mac?" he asked. "Run and get me a telegraph blank."

"Sure," Mac replied indefinitely, and vanished.

Jack opened the door and found himself confronting his uncle.

"Jack, you scoundrel, what do you mean by keeping me waiting in this vile-smelling, cooped-up hole?" Lawrence Follansby demanded in a testy manner. "Didn't they tell you I was waiting?"

"I'm awfully sorry, Uncle Lawrie," Jack replied, reaching out his sound hand. "They told me there was a—a gentleman here, but Mac didn't say who it was."

"Well, well, my boy, to think of you a champion!" the other exclaimed. There was pride in his accents and bearing. "I never realized before what fine exhibitions of science and courage these—er—affairs were."

"Why, were you there, uncle?" asked Jack, surprised.

"There! Of course I was there. Our good friend Levine sent me a complimentary ticket.

"At first I thought I would hunt him down and throw the fragments of the thing in his face. Then it occurred to me I ought to see the debasing spectacle for myself. Jack, you did yourself proud. How you did pound that low-browed ruffian! And now you're champion, eh?"

"No, I'm not champion, uncle," said Jack quietly.

"You're not? Why—why—what do you mean?"

"I've given the title back to the man that deserves it. I've fought my last ring fight."

His uncle stared at him incredulously.

"I don't understand what you're talking about," he said.

"It's very simple, Uncle Lawrie," Jack declared. "I fought to-night to square my record with the ring and with Sam Levine — most of all, with myself. The last time I fought, as you know, I was beaten. It was my own fault. I hadn't kept training.

"When this opportunity came to retrieve that fault, I owed it to myself to accept it. I lived up to the canons of the game by keeping in condition and by putting up a square fight. Now I'm free to take up another line of work without the disgrace of that old defeat as a drag. Do you understand?"

His uncle reflected. Perhaps understanding came. Be that as it may, he expressed his satisfaction.

"You did just right, Jack," said he. "As a Follansby, you could not have acted otherwise. I tell you, my boy, blood will tell. Your father, in your place, would have done just the same. And now, what next?"

"I don't exactly know. I've thought of a number of things; but when it comes to a show-down I'm not good for much. Outside of the navy, the only business I know anything about is fishing. I might buy a pretty good shore outfit with to-night's winnings."

"Fishing!" the old man snorted. "The idea of you turning fisherman!"

"It's no disgrace, uncle."

"Gentlemen don't fish, Jack, except for sport, and then only with the lightest of tackle. Whenever you feel called on to indulge that taste I'll send you to my salmon club in New Brunswick, and you can fish to your heart's content. Listen, boy.

"I'm not as young as I once was, and there's nobody to take over my business when I lay it down. Come in with me. We'll make it Lawrence Follansby & Co.—we'll make it anything you like. But quit this wandering, aimless life and establish yourself.

"Your room at the house hasn't been occupied since you left. It's ready for you. The housekeeper's always kept it aired and supplied with fresh linen against the time Master Jack came back. Some time before long you'll be wanting to get married—"

"That was what I was going to tell you, uncle," Jack interrupted.

"You've laid your plans already? So much the better. No, don't tell me who she is. Let me see her and judge for myself. But I'll say right now that I am sure you could not have chosen unworthily."

"The unworthiness is all on my side, Uncle Lawrie."

"Stuff! Nonsense! But will you come, Jack?"

How could he refuse? It would be coming into his own again without condition and without compromise. He held out his left hand again.

"I'll come, uncle," said he.

THE END.

TO DAFFODILS.

Fair Daffodils, we weep to see
You haste away so soon:
As yet the early rising sun
Has not attain'd his noon.
Stay, stay,
Until the hasting day
Has run
But to the even-song;
And, having pray'd together, we
Will go with you along.

We have short time to stay, as you,
We have as short a spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay
As you, or anything.
We die,
As your hours do, and dry
Away,
Like to the summer's rain;
Or as the pearls of morning's dew,
Ne'er to be found again.

Robert Herrick.

A Smiling Nemesis

By Simeon Russ

CHAPTER I.

OUTSIDE THE DOOR.

IT began brilliantly, this culminating evening in the fortunes of David Grelthorpe, giving no hint of the catastrophe with which it was to close.

As Grelthorpe, iron-jawed and steely eyed, looked from one to another of the little group gathered about his table, faultlessly attired in silk and broadcloth, their jewels gleaming in the soft light of the big dining-room, his glance reflected a supreme feeling of pleasure under the shaggy brows.

Shifting his gaze from guest to guest, it met that of his wife, sparkling happily into his, with a joy no whit inferior to his own.

For the Grelthorpes it was the day of days, the triumph of triumphs, the dawn of a new era in their lives. The subdued hum of conversation round them was the sweet music of victory—victory purchased at a huge cost of toil and scheming and heartache—but why should they remember such things in presence of the concrete fact that they had won?

For the Grelthorpes were the very pink and flower of social climbers. In David Grelthorpe's eyes (some bitter tongue had said) life was a game of chess in which self-respect was the first pawn sacrificed.

For fully fifteen years he had fought for social eminence; nor had his upward struggle been less arduous than that of the majority of climbers not wanted at the top of the social ladder. David had many times had reason to note how obstacles spring up in the path of those grimly determined to overcome them, whereas the paths of those bent on nothing of the sort are, with galling frequency, boulevards strewn with roses, macadamized, and decorated with arc-lights at regular intervals. David Grelthorpe, in his campaign for social recognition, seemed for years to carry a large, illuminated sign on his forehead, reading "Plant fist here."

But his courage—and that of his no less determined wife—had been more than equal to the resentments and antagonisms which his upward climb roused. Cold, masterful, lavish with his millions, hiding every hurt from those inflicting it, rendered doubly stubborn by resistance, he had pushed doggedly onward step by step.

And it may be truthfully said that, on the evening when this story opens, he was to be pardoned if he looked back upon fifteen years of sneers and snubs as not spent in vain.

For that little group about his board, in the rosy light of the shaded lamps, was well calculated to warm the soul of a climber and make him glow with satisfaction.

First among them, of course, one must cite Lord Lastermere, most run after of noblemen, just arrived in America, and confidently thought by a dozen mamas and papas to be on the brink of picking out a future Lady Lastermere from among the swarms of American girls to whom he had been introduced during his sojourn. There he sat, handsome and polished, basking in admiration, doling out to right and left smiles and empty phrases, supremely conscious of being the lion of the evening.

Lord Lastermere—at David Grelthorpe's board!

Then there were Mr. and Mrs. Furbush Challis, the young nobleman's sponsors, securely enthroned on the rarefiedest heights of society, still aglow with the pride of having unearthed the young lord in his native England during their last European tour and whisked him bodily across the Atlantic for the delectation and envy of their friends.

So, too, was Mr. Vedner present—Ackley Vedner—who, Lord Lastermere had graciously remarked, nobody could tell apart from an Englishman, a remark which had lifted Ackley to the seventh heaven of bliss.

The sprightly Mrs. Annandale was also among the guests; to go into the history of how the Grelthorpes had secured her "yes" to their dinner invitation would be to delve into the innermost secrets and write a very Odyssey of the painful art of climbing. Let it suffice to say that she was there, smiling graciously; acting, for all the world, as if the Grelthorpes "belonged." Could mortal ask more?

There, too, was Mrs. Stephen Vale—Mrs. "Stevie" Vale—who last season, at the Horse Show—

But enough of the component parts of this most dazzling party has been disclosed to show how tremendously, how irreproachably *chic* it was. There they sat, the august group, the ultra-select little coterie, an Everest in the mountain range of the social climber, exchanging polite nothings with their host and hostess, and seeming to say with every word they uttered: "Yes, sir and madam, we have taken you into our inner circle. You are now actually on a par with us. To-morrow you may be measured for wings and halos. Earth holds nothing more for you."

In the midst of the chatter Grelthorpe again stole a glance at his wife; her eyes shot back ineffable satisfaction. In the Grelthorpe history an epoch was indeed being marked.

"If only Claire were here," sighed Mrs. Grelthorpe to herself.

And she cast covetous eyes on Lord Lastermere. If only her daughter were his *vis-à-vis!* Then she glanced once more at her husband, and what she saw seemed to reassure and cheer her. The masterful gaze of David Grelthorpe, bent also on the young Englishman, told her all too plainly that, even though her daughter were absent, not a move in the Grelthorpe game was being neglected by her spouse.

All was well! So she returned with redoubled vigor to entertaining her guests; and it must be said that, for one not born to the purple, her small talk was small enough to deceive anybody.

"Yes," she rattled to Mrs. Furbush Challis. "Claire is a darling, but she's a headstrong girl—oh, very headstrong, my dear Mrs. Challis. You know what girls are; she took it into her head to be an artist, and nothing would do but a trip to Norway to find subjects for sketches. It's so picturesque up there, you know; the sun shines at night—or is it the moon in the daytime? Lord Lastermere, don't you simply love art?"

"I do," replied the nobleman, with the air of putting keen art criticism into scintillant epigrammatic form. Mrs. Grelthorpe clapped her hands ecstatically.

"I knew it!" she chirped. "You and Claire are absolutely sure to get along beautifully together from the first time you meet. It must be. Your

artistic impulses are sure to attract you to each other. Don't you think they will?"

"I do" agreed Lord Lastermere, with a bright smile. Mrs. Grelthorpe and Mrs. Furbush Challis looked at him admiringly. The hostess was about to take a deeper plunge into art when her attention was suddenly attracted to her husband. The butler had approached him, bent over his chair, and whispered something in his ear.

"See me? Did you say they wished to see me?" asked Grelthorpe, puzzled.

Two or three people besides his wife looked toward him curiously.

"Beg your pardon, sir"—the butler spoke with a little deprecating cough—"beg your pardon, sir, there's two of them outside and wants most particular to see you, and wouldn't give me any message. One gave me this."

The man handed over a small card. Grelthorpe took it, read it. Then he started violently and turned white as a sheet.

"What—why—"

For a moment all control seemed to leave him. With an iron effort he mastered himself and stared again at the card.

His wife had seen the start, the sudden pallor; also, several of the guests, scenting something out of the ordinary, were gazing toward the host.

"What is it, David?" asked Mrs. Grelthorpe.

"Nothing." He spoke quietly, but it was plain that to do so cost him another iron effort. "Please excuse me just for a minute," he went on. "There's a man outside whom I shall have to see for a moment. It—he—It's very important — very important, indeed. Matter of business."

He bowed and walked from the room. The hum of the dinner, broken a moment by the bizarre interruption, was gaily resumed.

Striding across the hall, David Grelthorpe reached the front door, which was thrown open by a servant.

Outside, partly concealed in the darkness, stood two men. One was tall and spare, the other squat and thick-set.

"What nonsense is this?" David Grelthorpe began angrily, striding across his threshold and coming thus close to the taller of the two men. Then he met the other's eyes—young man's eyes, gray, good-humored, unflinching.

David Grelthorpe staggered back a step and another; he kept himself from crumpling in a fall by flinging out a hand against the side of the door; even as it was, he careened violently against it and stood, quivering, staring wildly at the tall young man.

The two men outside the door stood in silence for a few seconds. Then the young and tall one, advancing into the square of light thrown from the chandelier in the front hall, was fully revealed to the master of the house.

David Grelthorpe leaned for a few more seconds against the door without uttering a syllable—seemingly unable to utter one.

Then the iron-jawed and steely-eyed millionaire, white and shaking, gasped, half to himself:

"It is! By God, that's who it is!"

CHAPTER II.

INTO SOCIETY.

THE young man smiled an engaging smile.

"You are right. It certainly is," he agreed in the most cheerful tones. "I can scarcely wonder at your melodramatic exclamation, your obvious surprise. Tell me — do I look well? Have the years improved my manly face and form? Let me see—ten years—it is ten years since we met."

He took a step forward into the light, peering mockingly into the stupefied eyes of Grelthorpe; from the hallway inside the servant, still holding the door open, gaped at the strange scene.

Grelthorpe said nothing.

"Tongue-tied, eh?" the youth rattled on. "Ah well! I can scarcely blame you. When one takes into consideration what my appearance here may mean to you, it is a wonder that you haven't thrown a fit all over your august threshold."

Still David Grelthorpe uttered no sound. The young man turned suddenly from him to the third man, his companion, lurking in the shadows behind him.

"Come hither, admiral!" he commanded with mock solemnity, and he made a low obeisance to the bizarre figure that, obedient to his command, slouched into the streak of light before the door.

It was a middle-aged man, his grayish hair matted in unbrushed confusion, his face apparently innocent of contact with a razor for many days, his clothes faded, unpressed, and plentifully patched. His shoes, worn at heel and toe, were knotted together with pieces of common string. On his head was something that had once been a derby, but now looked more like a battered can; beneath it twinkled eyes of piercing brightness. On this uncouth creature's lips was a smile as mocking as that with which his young companion, again turned to the mute master of the house.

"David Grelthorpe," he said in high-flown accents, "shake hands with Admiral Dreadnought; or perhaps, admiral, you prefer this evening to be Professor Copernicus? My friend," he continued, "does honor to the world in either capacity.

"To him the perils of the deep and the lore of the stars, the secrets of races living in remote fastnesses thousands of miles away, and the binomial theorem are bosom friends. David Grelthorpe, shake hands with Admiral Dreadnought! Become acquainted with Sir Isaac Newton the Second!"

The motley creature stretched out five dirt-rimmed fingers; suddenly abandoning his air of mockery, the tall youth looked straight into David Grelthorpe's eyes. In his gaze there was now menace.

Without a word, David Grelthorpe stretched out his hand to the bedraggled tramp.

"Glad to meet you, sir," he said.

The servant in the hall within stood frozen with amazement.

"Admiral Dreadnought," the young man continued, "has come to your threshold this evening in order to realize the dream of a lifetime. In spite of his manifold attainments, David Grelthorpe; in spite of having led expeditions against piratical Chinese junks and cast searching eyes into the unexplored jungles of astronomy, philosophy, and mathematics, he has never sat down at a really *recherché* dinner table.

"When, with touching sighs, he disclosed this cruel void in an otherwise crowded career, I told him that you were the very man who would see that his ambition was realized. Journeying to this great metropolis, we ascertained that you were giving a dinner than which nothing could be more exclusive.

"'Professor,' I said to my friend, 'here is your chance. Don't trouble to dress; David Grelthorpe is the most delightfully informal man alive; he well knows that a celebrity like you would grace any board, even though he appear in shirt-sleeves, with nose bangles and carrying a huge three-pronged Malayan spear.'

"Struck by my reasoning, the admiral acquiesced. He has come, as you see, in most charmingly unconventional garb. No sycophantic razor has whisked from his cheeks the marks that denote the man of adventure and science, whose thoughts are far from barber-shops and such like effete spots.

"David Grelthorpe!" All the mockery again went out of the young man's voice, and his eyes leaped to those of the master of the house with such a fire of menace smoldering in them that Grelthorpe involuntarily

stepped back. "It is getting rather chilly out here, and my friend is scantily clothed. Take him into your house at once, seat him at your table, introduce him to everybody — especially to Lord Lastermere, and"— here his glance became stony in its menace—"see that you treat him as if he were the welcomest of all your guests. Do you understand?"

Silence fell on the strange group. For a moment Grelthorpe made no movement. Then, raising his eyes, he caught those of the young man. Straightening himself up, he motioned to the tramp.

"Come in, sir," he said.

The tramp bowed in mockery. "Good night, mah deah boy," he said to the young man. "I'm going into society, mah deah boy."

Then, with a ridiculous little jigging step, he followed Grelthorpe into the mansion. The servant, utterly beyond the power of speech and almost of motion, closed the door behind the pair.

CHAPTER III.

AN ÉLITE FUNCTION.

TOGETHER the two men—one well groomed and faultlessly attired in evening garb; the other frowsy, unkempt, and tattered—traversed the hall of Grelthorpe's residence and made for the door of his dining-room. From within came the chatter of the dinner-party.

"Oh, now, really, Mrs. Grelthorpe; really, you oughtn't to say that of me, my dear Mrs. Grelthorpe—really, you oughtn't, you know," Lord Lastermere was protesting to his hostess, leaning toward her with what he intended to be a fascinating smile.

Suddenly as he did so he noticed that her eyes, fastened on him but the moment before with utter absorption in his fatuities, had strayed toward the door and fallen a prey to amazement. Mechanically the young man's glance followed hers to rest upon David Grelthorpe, his lower jaw thrust forward as if in grim determination to see something through to the bitter finish, and behind him, embracing the select party in a ridiculously satisfied grin, his unshaven and ragged companion.

The eyes of all had turned with those of the horrified hostess; all rested with hers and Lord Lastermere's on this extraordinary apparition; forks and knives dropped from the fingers of the guests; all was forgotten in the stupefaction that spread through the room. It communicated itself to the servants, who stood as if struck to stone wherever the apparition had caught them.

The ragged one advanced, bowing absurdly to right and left, muttering to himself as if greatly elated. Hostess and guests sat rigid. With teeth clenched tightly together, David Grelthorpe traversed the room to his seat; his uncouth companion broke into a jig behind him.

"Another chair, William," he said gravely to the butler.

With a violent effort, the latter, who had been looking at the ragged individual with every trace of his usual aloofness and frigidity scattered to the four winds, wrenched himself back to earth and hurriedly placed a chair to the left of Grelthorpe's, and next to that of the sprightly Mrs. Annandale. The newcomer dropped into it with a sigh of contentment.

"Ho, ho! I sit among the elect," he chuckled. "Eureka! I swell with pride. I am in society. I buzz with delight."

"This," announced David Grelthorpe, sweeping the party with a glance that commanded silence and attention, "is my old friend, Professor Copernicus, a much-traveled and learned man. He has just arrived in town; not knowing that I was giving this dinner to-night, he came here to pay his respects to me. I have insisted that he join us."

His steely eyes, beneath lowering, gray eyebrows, challenged his wife and each guest as again they swept round the table. One or two squirmed in confusion; Lord Lastermere nervously sipped from his wine-glass. Nobody spoke.

"Professor, my wife, my friends." Grelthorpe rattled off the names of those present in a jumble. The "professor," leaping to his feet, gave forth a series of ridiculous little bobs of the head.

"Tickled to death, sports!" he said, smirking to right and left. His dirty cheeks, beneath their fringe of hair, glowed with pleasure.

"Say," he remarked, plucking Grelthorpe's sleeve and pointing deliberately at Lord Lastermere, "is that a real bonyfidy nobleman?"

Grelthorpe nodded in silence. The nobleman again sipped wine.

"Gee, Copernicus, you're all to the mustard!" chuckled the ragged one. "Once," he went on, turning to Lord Lastermere, "I was out in China and met a fellow that called himself a lord, but he was a flimflam. He deceived my trusting soul, wrung my noble heart, and abruptly left me in the middle of the night with my brand-new suit of pajamas! You wouldn't do that, would you, my boy?"

There was no answer. The speaker looked about, gazing at each of those at the table with great good humor and interest.

"Dave, old boy," he said presently, "what's the matter with letting me have oceans of champagne? I wish to drink the health of all these lofty individuals."

Grelthorpe made a sign to the butler. While the newcomer's glass was being filled the assemblage sat without a word, struck mute at the strange scene being enacted before their eyes. The stranger drained his glass at a gulp.

"More!" he muttered. "Much more! A noble brew, Grelthorpe, old top! Once I stole into the home of a mandarin in Hong-Kong and appropriated seven bottles of most excellent fizz—but it was inferior to this nectar.

"Incidentally, the mandarin, being a light sleeper, woke up, heard me, bawled out his opinion of me from the top of the stairs, and got one of the bottles between the eyes for his impudence. Ha, ha, stirring times! Surely, Grel, old boy, you'll favor me with some rich food."

At another sign from the host one of the servants hastened up with a platter of chicken, from which the other helped himself copiously. Then he tucked a napkin under his frowsy chin and turned suddenly to his neighbor, Mrs. Annandale.

"Who are you?" he asked.

Mrs. Annandale proved herself worthy of the undying gratitude of Grelthorpe by what she did. Looking straight into the questioner's eyes, she answered with a smile; to her apparently it was merely a source of amusement; not a trace did she show of shock or annoyance. Grelthorpe's eyes telegraphed his appreciation as she said, still smiling:

"I am Mrs. Annandale."

"A lovely name, musical as the spring breeze in the treetops," commented her neighbor. "How joyous a sound it has—William, the juice!" Again he turned to Mrs. Annandale:

"Prithee, dame, and are you a tip-top swell?"

Mrs. Annandale burst into peals of laughter. The ragged one looked critically at her costume.

"Reminds me of the garb of the natives of the Nootch-nootch islands," he volunteered.

"Indeed!" she smiled; "what do the natives there wear?"

"Nothing."

Her ringing laughter again saved the day. Something like a smile blossomed on two or three of the stricken faces about the board. Grelthorpe, gritting his teeth, forced the semblance of amusement into his own face. At

the other end of the table Mrs. Grelthorpe, ashen pale, was saying flutteringly to Lord Lastermere:

"Professor Copernicus always was so deliciously eccentric. David met him years ago and took the greatest fancy to him—so interesting!"

"How's that?" bellowed the ragged guest suddenly. "David met me years ago? David took a fancy to me? Why, David never saw me in his life before to-night. Did you, Dave, old grampus?"

Grelthorpe smiled uncomfortably.

"Professor, you will have your little joke, I see," he murmured. "William, fill the professor's glass."

"Right, William," said the professor. "Fill it up to the brim without fear, you wooden-faced child of sin!"

Then, his roving eye catching that of the horrified Mrs. Furbush Challis, on the other side of the host, he grinned engagingly at her and abruptly asked:

"Who are you?"

The lady addressed lowered her eyes without answering; her white cheek and quivering fingers testified to her perturbation and anger. Her husband glared across the table at the uncouth questioner.

Mrs. Grelthorpe seemed on the verge of swooning; every one avoided every one else's eye. Grelthorpe, his face hardened into resolute lines, grimly shouldered the burden he had brought upon himself.

"That, professor, is my good friend, Mrs. Furbush Challis," he explained.

"Regular swell?"

"You bet!" Grelthorpe gave a hollow laugh. Nobody took it up.

"Everybody here a member of the élite, eh?"

Grelthorpe nodded.

"O-ho!" The guest stood up, his napkin dangling absurdly below his hairy cheeks, and raised his glass in mock salutation.

"Here's your health, élite!" he cried. "Here's to you, crêam de la crêam! Honored to know you. Wow, but you're a frozen bunch, though! Don't you ever catch cold sitting round all day behind those sherbet faces? Can't you smile? Come on, oblige me with a smile. Or else let's do a tarantella." He turned to Mrs. Challis. "Madam, may I have the honor of a whirl?"

David Grelthorpe, reaching out a hand, pulled the professor into his seat.

"Later perhaps we may dance," he said evenly. "Now I wish you would try some of this ice and a cup of coffee."

The strange being looked at him quizzically.

"Embarrassed, eh?" he inquired. "Seeking to pass it all off with an air of nonchalance? Oh, well, I've a big piece of news for you, David. Lean toward me, smiling seraphically as I speak."

"Dave"—he put his lips close to his host's ear—"if you will sign a paper certifying that I have been present at a really élite function, and if you will give me one hundred dollars cash, and — and — one of those pearl buttons in the front of your shirt, I will depart — vamose — exit. Is it a bargain?"

In the midst of the deadly silence that ensued David Grelthorpe took out a note-book, tore from it a page, and scribbled a few words. He handed it to the man beside him. The latter read aloud:

> "This is to certify that Professor Copernicus was present at a really élite function in my house.
>
> "DAVID GRELTHORPE."

"Thanks, Dave," he said. He produced a very seedy card-case, put the piece of paper into it, and smiled pleasantly round the table.

"Now the money, Dave."

Grelthorpe took from his card-case two fifty-dollar bills and handed them over. They were transferred to the seedy card-case.

"Now the pearl button."

Amid the silence that still held all in the room the host prièd away one of the pearl studs from his shirt-front, and surrendered it. The "professor" salaamed.

"Wonderful!" he murmured. "And now—I am a man of my word." He drained his glass. "I go. Good night, David Grelthorpe. Good night, crêam de la crêam!" Rising to his feet, he bestowed a comprehensive bow on the assembled company and walked majestically toward the door. Near it he stopped, lost in contemplation of a flunky.

"Who are you?" he asked.

The flunky's mouth opened and shut without emitting a sound. On his brow beads of perspiration started forth.

Professor Copernicus, with a loud burst of mocking laughter, strode across the hall and vanished through the front door.

For a minute or so nobody spoke or moved in the dining-room. In silent horror they sat there, drumming nervously with their fingers upon the cloth, hesitating to look at each other.

Then Mrs. Grelthorpe rose. Every one mechanically followed. In a dismal train they walked to the drawing-room. Almost without preliminaries Mrs. Challis and her husband stammered their adieus and went away. One by one the other guests departed in their wake.

Lord Lastermere plunged manfully into a sprightly anecdote; it fell flat. He, too, wrapped in the gathering chill, rushed away in a panic.

Less than half an hour after the fatal meal had come to a close David Grelthorpe and his wife stood, abandoned by their company, facing each other.

"David, what do you mean by—"

With a sudden, masterful gesture he checked the torrent of fury rising to her lips.

"Leave me alone!" he snapped with brutal roughness. "Leave me alone, confound you!"

"Are you mad to—to— Why did you—"

Again he flung up his hand.

"None of your business!" he thundered. And, turning abruptly on his heel, he strode out of the room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE THÉ DANSANT.

In a taxicab speeding along Fifth Avenue two men were seated beside each other in silence. One looked straight ahead of him, frowning and biting his lips with obvious vexation—David Greithorpe it was. The other, a tall, fair-haired young man, wore a broad smile as he gazed with apparent interest at the procession of vehicles and pedestrians passing along the great thoroughfare.

"Are you sure that you gave the chauffeur the right address?" inquired the young man, as the traffic policeman waved that they might cross Forty-Second Street.

"Yes!" growled Grelthorpe.

"How abrupt we are this beautiful afternoon," the youth rattled on. "Surely, you will understand my anxious desire to avoid mistakes. If we were to miss attending the *thé dansant* at the Furbush Challises, to which you have so graciously bidden me"—here he smiled more than ever—"the consequences might be unpleasant. In fact, there's no telling what the consequences might be. So let's be sure that we are taken to the Challises and nowhere else."

He turned eyes alight with mischievous enjoyment on his companion, who merely growled out:

"I told the chauffeur the right address."

The taxi hurried along, Grelthorpe scowling, the young man smiling and humming a happy little tune. Then the vehicle swerved eastward into a cross-street and became one of several which were edging their way toward a door on the north side of the street

and discharging their gaily clad women and men. At the sight something like a shiver ran through Grelthorpe's big frame. His companion simply smiled with added cheerfulness.

The Challises' *thé dansant!* At the thought Grelthorpe shivered again. During the week that had passed since the fatal dinner at his home, so rudely marred by the appearance of the individual in rags, he and his wife had worked like beavers to restore their shattered prestige—she especially. Flying from one to another of her acquaintances in society, bought at such an enormous cost in time and toil, she had poured out explanation so voluble and plausible of the ridiculous intrusion at their feast that none had had the heart not to accept them and seek to forget.

The "professor," she had explained again and again, had always been eccentric, but never before had he been guilty of unseemly behavior — undoubtedly the poor man had become insane from his studies and research work in remote parts of the world. Her husband, in welcoming him and asking him to join the party at the table, had failed to notice the other's ragged garb, being prevented from doing this by the darkness outside the door. Grelthorpe, she went on, had counted on giving his guests an unconventional treat by introducing his old friend, whose delightful conversational gifts and deep learning had often charmed him and his friends.

"Poor David's mortification is pitiful!" she would conclude. "It is all I can do to make him attend to his business affairs and keep up his interest in life."

Before such protestations even the anger of the Furbush Challises melted away, and on the day of their tea the extraordinary incident at the Grelthorpes' was as nearly forgotten — or at least forgiven—as such a thing possibly could be.

And now—David Grelthorpe ground his teeth in impotent fury as the taxicab stopped at the Challises' door. The young man, noticing, smiled sweetly and again hummed his happy little tune.

With perfect assurance he walked into the house behind Grelthorpe and nobody thought to question his right to do so. With perfect assurance he laid aside hat and overcoat. Never for a moment did he allow his eyes to stray from the face of his companion. As if it were a veritable feast to him, he watched with his unending smile the alternation of anger, mortification and abject despair that coursed over the rugged features of David Grelthorpe.

The two pressed into the throng of guests, into the chattering and laughter and tinkle of teacups. To their ears came the gay strains of dance music; through the shifting groups of guests could be seen the Hungarian orchestra in red-braided coats.

A few paces ahead, David Grelthorpe caught sight of his wife and Mrs. Challis, the hostess. He stopped for an instant as if his progress had been arrested by a stone wall and a look of defiance came into his face as he turned to his companion.

He met steel. Pausing by the side of the door into the drawing-room, the young man said quietly:

"Well?"

The eyes of the two clashed. Then David Grelthorpe, white but resolute, strode forward into the room, making straight for the group ahead of him. In it, beside his wife and hostess, he recognized Lord Lastermere.

A few yards from them his firm walk changed to a stagger. He lurched violently against a guest holding a teacup, spilling the tea into the saucer. Instead of apologizing, he raised a hand and pushed the astonished individual out of the way.

The first warning that his wife and those about her had of his advent was when he careened suddenly against her chair. With an inane grin on his face, and in a thick voice that jarred

strangely on the waltz melody being played by the Hungarian musicians, he said:

"Hello, bunch. I'm drunk."

Startled, his wife looked up, and, catching sight of him, laughed nervously. The faces of the others expressed unbounded amazement.

Grelthorpe dropped heavily into a chair and, pointing a shaking finger at the musicians, shouted:

"Get 'em to stop. Tell 'em—hic—to stop. Cut it out, you goulashes! Can't you see I'm drunk?"

His voice rang through the room. Several couples stopped dancing. Two or three musicians cast astonished glances toward the speaker.

"Stop that noise, you darned red monkeys!"

Dancing and waltz melody ceased simultaneously. There was a rustle of skirts, a clatter of cups suddenly set down—otherwise dead silence.

The young man leaning against the wall by the door smiled delightedly.

"David—" Mrs. Grelthorpe started to speak, but she was prevented by her husband who, leaping suddenly from his chair, lurched over to where Lord Lastermere was sitting, in open-mouthed embarrassment, and shaking his finger in the nobleman's face, roared out, so loudly that he could be heard from one end of the room to the other:

"After my daughter, aren't you? Want a rich American girl for a wife, don't you? Well, there's nothing doing! Go look for somebody else!"

Then he staggered back, collapsed into his chair; his head dropped to one side as if he were dead. Men closed in about him and carried him hastily to a room at the back of the house.

The young man by the door, still smiling, stole away.

Half an hour later David Grelthorpe opened his eyes to find himself in his motor-car, seated beside his wife. She was white with anger and shame.

"You drunkard!" she hissed, as she saw his consciousness returning.

Grelthorpe sat upright. He was white to the lips. He seized her hand roughly.

"Did you ever know me to touch a drop of drink?"

"Never. But you are drunk now."

"I swear to you by Heaven," he said between clenched teeth, "that I have not touched a drop of drink today."

CHAPTER V.

TRAVELING EXPENSES.

On returning to his hotel, Lord Lastermere was confronted in the down-stairs corridor by David Grelthorpe.

"Lord Lastermere," said Grelthorpe, "you are a man of the world and realize perfectly well how one may be most unexpectedly overtaken by drink as I was this afternoon. It is a thing that never happened to me before and never will again. Please accept my apology."

"Really, now, Mr. Grelthorpe," said the nobleman good-humoredly. "There's no need of worrying. I understand—"

The other cut him short.

"I am a man of few words," he said, "and I'll waste none now. I have something important to say to you."

He motioned the way to a couple of chairs, comparatively isolated from the rest of the people in the corridor. The two men sat down.

"Lord Lastermere, let's mince no words. I wish you to be the husband of my daughter Claire. You doubtless know that she will be very rich on my death. That is not all."

Grelthorpe paused and the young Englishman leaned forward intently.

"Lord Lastermere, if you succeed in winning my daughter's hand I agree to give you the sum of one million dollars, besides settling two million on her and arranging to leave her the bulk of my estate when I die."

The young man's eyes glistened, but he kept silence. Grelthorpe continued:

"I don't mind telling you that, before the unfortunate occurrence of this afternoon, I had no intention of being so generous. But after what I said to you I feel it incumbent upon me to show that I want nothing better than to have you as my son-in-law.

"Had I not acted as I did this afternoon I should have settled only one million on Claire and, I must confess, I should not have offered the one million outright to you. But I shall stop at nothing to efface my treatment of you."

The young man waved his hand deprecatingly.

"To be the husband of your charming daughter," he said, "is such an honor that, were she penniless, it would not abate in the least the ardor of my suit. Nevertheless—"

It was Grelthorpe's turn to wave his hand.

"Enough," he said. "I am a business man, and you need not say another word. As a business man, I believe in promptness. My daughter is now on a sketching trip somewhere in Norway. I desire you to hunt her up at once. Both my wife and I shall write to her, telling her of your journey, and both of us shall urge her in the strongest terms to bestow her hand upon you."

The nobleman bowed politely. David Grelthorpe drew from his pocket one of his cards and wrote some words upon it.

"Here is the address of Claire's bankers. They have branches all over Europe. As a matter of fact, I am not quite sure myself where she is just now, as she is an impulsive girl and changes her plans at a moment's notice. Her last letter was from up somewhere near the North Cape. I should advise you to sail for Europe at once — there is a steamer leaving New York to-morrow for Liverpool.

"But, Mr. Grelthorpe," began Lord Lastermere, and then stopped, in confusion. Grelthorpe laid a hand on his arm.

"Young man," he said, "I know quite well what you were going to say, and I feel sure that you will not be offended if a man old enough to be your father takes the liberty of offering you a check to cover your traveling expenses."

"Oh, my dear, sir, I couldn't think of accepting—simply couldn't do it," exclaimed the nobleman with great volubility.

For answer Grelthorpe rose, crossed to a desk on the other side of the corridor, wrote out a check, signed it and, returning, handed it in silence to the other. Lord Lastermere took it with a mumbled word or two of thanks.

"Good-by, and good luck," said Grelthorpe. The two shook hands. Then Grelthorpe, putting on his hat, strode down the corridor and out of the hotel. Emerging on Thirty-Fourth Street, he started to walk toward Broadway.

He had not gone more than half a block before he felt a tap on his shoulder, and turning, found by his side the young man of the perennial smile with whom he had entered the Challis mansion that afternoon. Grelthorpe's jaw set, his brows came together in a black frown, fire shot from his eyes. The other, apparently not noticing these danger signals, said cheerily:

"How do you do? Just been in the Waldorf, eh? You needn't explain. I know what you were there for."

"Darn you!" hissed Grelthorpe, stopping short in his stride. "I've had enough of this. I'm not going to stand this sort of thing any longer."

The other seemed to enjoy this outburst immensely.

"Oh, yes, you're going to stand it," he said. "I'm only just beginning. Don't scowl and gnash your teeth."

As he spoke the smile was replaced by the same look of menace that his face had worn on the night of his appearance on Grelthorpe's threshold. Striding close to the millionaire, he

suddenly seized the lapel of his coat and shot into the other's eyes a look before which all Grelthorpe's defiance melted like snow in the sunlight.

For a moment neither spoke. Then the young man loosened his grasp. His smile returned.

"There was a slight mistake, was there not?"

Grelthorpe said nothing.

"Now tell me what happened in the Waldorf," continued the young man. "And be very careful—very, very careful—that your memory plays you no tricks. It will be much better for you if it does not. You asked Lord Lastermere to marry your daughter?"

Grelthorpe paused a moment, glaring at his questioner. Then he nodded in the affirmative.

"Going to send Lord Lastermere after your daughter?"

The millionaire nodded.

"Ah! Very sly. Very resourceful. Kindly give me your daughter's address."

The eyes of the two men met. Grelthorpe, livid but silent, took out a card, wrote on it and handed it over.

"Perfectly sure this is right?"

Grelthorpe nodded.

"Did you pay Lord Lastermere's traveling expenses?"

The frown gathered on Grelthorpe's face.

"Come now, there's no need for getting angry. I see that you did. You will certainly not object to paying mine. How much money have you with you?"

"Four hundred dollars."

"Not enough. Give me—hm—let us say two thousand. You see, I am going to take your dear friend Professor Copernicus to Europe with me. Come, let us go into some place where you can write out a check.

In silence they walked to Broadway and entered a café. There Grelthorpe called for pen and ink and produced his check-book.

"How shall I make it out?" he asked.

"Payable to bearer." The pen scratched over the slip of paper. Grelthorpe signed the check and gave it to the other, who carefully put it in his card-case.

"Have a drink?" he inquired. Grelthorpe abruptly shook his head.

"Ah, then you won't mind waiting while I have a beer. Waiter, one beer."

As he sat sipping it, Grelthorpe suddenly snapped:

"What do you intend to do?"

His companion set down his glass with a sigh of enjoyment.

"I haven't quite made up my mind which of two things will annoy you most," he replied. "Perhaps you could tell me yourself."

Grelthorpe growled something unintelligible. The youth pursued:

"Which would you prefer—to have your daughter married to me or to Professor Copernicus?"

With a hoarse curse, David Grelthorpe leaped to his feet and, without a word of farewell, strode out of the café.

The young man finished his beverage, paid for it, and departed, whistling happily.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BROTHERS.

It behooves us now to go back many years from the happenings narrated in the preceding chapters of this tale and learn something of the earlier history of that much-harassed individual, Mr. David Grelthorpe.

It behooves us to go back to a time when he was anything but the grand personage to whom we have been introduced; anything but the retired millionaire, scaler of snow-capped social pinnacles, entertainer of the scions of the British nobility.

Grelthorpe began life as a barefooted boy in a Pennsylvania hamlet. He and his older brother, Philip, after a few years of elementary schooling, were

sent out into the world to do what they could for their support. David ran errands, swept out shops, carried bundles—did everything, in short, that anybody would let him do.

A dollar in those days was a thing of one hundred important parts, every one of which spelled sweat and toil. But, in every one of his jobs, he showed the same bulldog qualities which he afterward displayed in social climbing. Thirty years from the time when he had been pitched neck and crop on the world he was a prosperous coffee merchant in New York, with a business down on Water Street which was yielding him a handsome revenue, and a wife in whose company he had already set out on the upward path that was eventually to land him among the august social lights to whom we have been introduced in the previous chapters.

And what of his brother Philip Grelthorpe?

Ah, there was success incarnate!

Successful as David had been in his life, Philip Grelthorpe had managed to eclipse him at every step. Philip Grelthorpe, taken all in all, was not his brother's equal in sheer ability. In his career there were errors of judgment, sudden vagaries which might have cost him dear were it not for the fact that from the outset he had been a prime favorite of fortune.

Money pursued him—whether he tried to get it or not, it came to him. After preliminaries as arduous as those of his brother he had gravitated to Pittsburgh and fallen in with a group of ambitious youths, associated with whom he had been caught up and swept forward by a veritable tidal wave of success.

They went into the steel business. By a chain of brilliant good fortune they made money hand over fist. Rendered jealous by their upward march, a huge rival bought them out back in the seventies. Philip Grelthorpe, not yet forty, found himself with over a million dollars in his pocket.

He took a fling at the stock-market—it proved his obedient slave. Within the next five years he ran his fortune up, up, ever up. And then, at a point where many a man apparently far wiser than himself would have continued to plunge until ruined, he suddenly "stood pat" and took stock of his affairs.

He was forty years old; he owned ten million dollars. He decided to stop, and did.

Years before he had married, but no children had come of the marriage. This, to Philip, was bitter, for he was of a loving nature and longed for progeny on whom to bestow his love. So when a distant cousin of his wife, a five-year-old boy, was left an orphan and in need, Grelthorpe adopted him and lavished upon the lad all the pent-up affection in his heart.

The boy proved himself worthy of this love. Receiving the name of Roland Grelthorpe, he grew up fine-grained and manly, and Philip's love for him became a veritable obsession.

But it did not keep him from maintaining the closest of brotherly relations with David Grelthorpe, of New York; there could be no question that the successful steel man cherished the deepest affection for the successful coffee merchant. On the other hand, careful observers might see that Philip's phenomenal success in life irked and galled his unquestionably astuter brother.

Nevertheless, David took care to betray nothing of this to Philip; he received his elder's unceasing testimonials of affection composedly, but decently enough, and professed a deep regard for young Roland.

Then, in the year 19—, Philip Grelthorpe's wife died, and three months later Philip Grelthorpe lay on his death-bed. Summoning his brother from New York, Philip besought him to care for Roland, orphaned now for the second time. In the ghastly half darkness of the death chamber, leaning across the dying man's bed and

clasping his hand, David Grelthorpe swore to be a father to the fifteen-year-old boy.

"He will be a very rich man some day, David," whispered Philip Grelthorpe, "but that isn't the most important thing in life. You and I began barefooted and penniless. Teach him to work, Dave; teach him to be a man like yourself."

"I promise," said David Grelthorpe huskily, squeezing his brother's hand. Then the breath of the man in whose life good luck and a good heart had played equally prominent parts went out of his body and he stiffened in death.

His will left the bulk of his fortune in trust for Roland. David was appointed trustee and one million dollars was willed to him outright.

Emerging from the death-chamber, the rough-visaged uncle tried in his clumsy way to console the boy sobbing in utter misery. Putting his arm about Roland, David Grelthorpe reiterated the promises he had made to his dead brother.

A week later, after the funeral, Roland was informed by his uncle, who had returned in the mean time to New York, that by the end of the month he would be ready to receive him in New York and give him his first taste of a business training.

"You will go back to school, of course, in the autumn," David Grelthorpe wrote; "but there's no such thing as beginning too soon for one who is going to be a fine young business man. I'll put you to work in the office of a business friend of mine, because I don't believe in giving you a job myself. No uncle can be a real boss to his nephew."

Friends of Philip Grelthorpe presented objections to David's course with Roland. Why not let the boy finish school and go to college, they asked, before putting him to work? But David overcame them all.

"Phil and I went to work when we were twelve," he would say, "and never dreamed for an instant of going to college. We got our high-school diplomas and college degrees in the University of Hard Knocks.

"Just because Roland will be a millionaire and able to loaf to the end of his days, if he wants to, is no reason why he shouldn't have a chance of learning that work is the best thing in the world. So long as I have the say, there will be no loafing in his life."

So one summer day, a month after his adopted father's death, a slender boy with pleasant, brown eyes and a captivating smile alighted from a Pittsburgh express-train in Jersey City and looked up and down the arrival platform in search of somebody.

Finally his eyes found David Grelthorpe, standing as if in a reverie, jaws clenched tight together, a cruel frown on his face. At sight of the boy the frown was chased away by a broad smile. They clasped hands.

"Well, Roland, ready for work?"

The boy nodded.

"Yes, uncle," he said, "and I think I'm going to like it, even if you won't be my boss." Looking up with a merry smile, he added: "Do you think I'll like it?"

"Of course, of course," said David Grelthorpe hastily.

The frown had returned to his face. Seizing the boy's hand suddenly and almost crushing it in an iron grasp, he pulled him toward the ferry for New York.

CHAPTER VII.

ROLAND'S BOSS.

"ROLAND," said David Grelthorpe, "this is Mr. Hetheridge. He is a coffee merchant—like me. From tomorrow he will be your boss."

They were in a room at a big New York hotel. Roland held out his hand politely and tried his best to conceal the surprise within him.

Hetheridge, to his mind, did not look

the least bit like a coffee merchant—or, for that matter, any kind of a merchant.

He was a man of powerful build, with brutish features. His eyes, shifting, watery, and rimmed with red, shot an unfriendly glance at the boy and then shifted away.

His complexion was splotchy and rich in pimples, his sack suit shiny from long use, his collar and cuffs frayed and grimy. But what struck Roland most unpleasantly about the man was his thick, red nose with its little purple veins threading it like the river deltas on maps at schools.

The boy could not help thinking that here was a coffee merchant whose favorite beverage was certainly not coffee.

But he held out his hand and smiled up at Hetheridge trustingly, meeting the man's shifting glances with his own frank eyes.

"My boy," continued David Grelthorpe, "you will spend your time tonight at Mr. Hetheridge's home over on Long Island. I should like nothing better than to take you with me, but it happens that both your aunt and I must go out of town overnight, and it would be altogether too lonesome for you at our house. Hetheridge, what time does your train leave?"

"Five o'clock."

"Is everything ready?"

"Everything."

"Very well."

Grelthorpe patted the boy kindly on the shoulder.

"And now, Roland, I must leave you. To-morrow morning you will begin work in Mr. Hetheridge's office down-town. To-morrow evening I will come there to fetch you and take you home with me."

He squeezed his nephew's hand. Then, turning away suddenly without another word, he almost ran from the room.

Roland could hear his footsteps pattering rapidly down the corridor.

The boy felt somewhat aggrieved at the turn affairs had taken. In the loneliness that had been his since his double bereavement he had looked forward to being with his uncle in New York. In David Grelthorpe's home he hoped to find something of the home life which he had lost.

Instead, here he was alone in a strange city with a man whom he instinctively disliked.

But, being a boy of a philosophical and cheerful cast of mind, he stiffened his upper lip and tried to improve matters by smiling engagingly at his companion.

But Hetheridge evinced no interest in the amenities of life.

"Come along," said he in a very gruff voice. "We haven't any too much time to catch that five o'clock." He strode out of the room.

Roland, snatching up his satchel, followed hurriedly.

"I suppose he wants to show me he's my boss," reflected the boy ruefully as he walked beside the surly Hetheridge.

Together they left the hotel and boarded a cross-town trolley-car.

From its windows New York of a summer afternoon offered so much to interest a fifteen-year-old boy of alert mind that he found no time to bother about Hetheridge's demeanor or the life that lay in store for him with that disagreeable individual as a boss.

They moved eastward on Thirty-Fourth Street with the fits and starts characteristic of New York street-cars, to the accompaniment of automobile *honks* in every key, the shrill cries of newsboys in none at all, pounding across avenues jammed with life, diving under "L" trestles, brought to an abrupt stop by brakes rudely clamped on, humming forward again at a pace that narrowly missed too leisurely pedestrians.

Roland, shifting about in his seat to get a better view of this or that, devoured it all with a boy's healthy interest. Hetheridge stared straight ahead of him and said nothing till

they reached the East Thirty-Fourth Street ferry, when he growled:

"Come on. Here we are."

It was the same thing over again in the train that took them out of Long Island City to the green stretches of Long Island—Roland devouring every sight that unrolled itself outside the car windows, Hetheridge, hunched up behind an evening newspaper, in unbroken wordlessness.

They traveled thus for about one hour, stopping at half a dozen waystations, until, at a particularly humble one, Hetheridge rose from his seat beside the boy and said in his gruff voice:

"Here we are. Hustle up now."

Roland rose, seized his satchel, and alighted from the train behind his gruff guide. The engine whistled, the car wheels creaked as they felt its tug, and the train rolled out into some mysterious loneliness farther along the line. In a few minutes it had rounded a curve and was lost to view.

All about the little station where he found himself Roland could see patches of scrubby underbrush and, a bit in the distance, stunted woods, barely visible in the gathering dusk of the evening. There was only one other building beside the little station—a low frame shanty surmounted by a huge sign reading "Real Estate" that seemed about to crush it into the earth by sheer weight.

Stretching out behind into the waste of scrub and woods was a wide and pretentious avenue, lined with cement sidewalks and double rows of incipient trees. The imposing effect of this thoroughfare from nowhere in particular to nowhere at all was marred by the tufts of grass that protruded through cracks in the cement and the weeds that flourished apparently unmolested in the roadway.

A desolate sort of place, reflected Roland, for a prosperous New York coffee merchant to choose as a residence.

With a sign to the boy, Hetheridge walked past the shanty and into the avenue. There was nobody about; in the surrounding solitude their footsteps reverberated uncannily.

They walked for a distance corresponding roughly to a couple of city blocks, and then both cement and roadway came to an end, as if halted by some unseen power, and they continued their progress straight into the scrub along what was little better than a path.

On and on they went, through underbrush and stunted trees, while the darkness grew, with no glimmering light anywhere to suggest that human beings lived near. There was nothing but silence except when their feet trod on some twig or crackling branch.

Then the man turned suddenly into a by-path. After a few paces Roland saw before him a two-story frame house, dropped as if from above in the midst of all the desolation. The paint was worn from its façade in big patches, one of the blinds had almost broken loose from its fastenings. In fact, there was about the house a broken-down air that went well with the solitudes in which it stood.

"My little crib," remarked Hetheridge with sudden bluff good humor. "No city frills for me. I love the country, young feller, and not the cityfied country neither—that ain't my style. Me for the real stuff, with fields and woods and plenty of open spaces for the wind to howl through in winter. None o' yer namby-pamby country places, with garages and flunkies and heaps of silver on the table and a tellyphone!"

All this he said while he searched in his pocket for a key and fitted it into the lock of the door. Roland wondered whether other New York merchants said "ain't" and "feller." Certainly his Uncle David and the business friends of his dead father did not.

But here the door swung open and gave a check to his reflections.

As he followed Hetheridge into the

house an involuntary exclamation of surprise escaped him. There was not a stick of furniture in sight. Hetheridge catching the boy's exclamation and noticing the look of surprise on his face, explained volubly:

"Oh, I've just moved in. My old house, where I've lived for twenty years, is up the road a bit. Expect to have the missus and the kids over here by the end of the week. Walk right in, my boy, and make yourself at home."

Roland set down his satchel and took off his hat. Hetheridge made for the rear of the building, and could be heard rummaging about, apparently getting things ready for dinner—nowhere was there a sign of a servant or any other form of human being.

For a while the boy examined the bare walls of the hall. Growing tired of that, he walked over past the front door to a door at right angles to it which, he judged, led into a front parlor.

He turned the knob. The door was locked.

At that moment he heard the footsteps of Hetheridge approaching. His hand fell from the knob.

"Come up and I'll show you your room!" called Hetheridge.

The boy picked up his satchel and, guided by the man, went up a narrow flight of stairs and along a narrow corridor to a room at the front of the house directly over that which he had just found locked. Hetheridge flung open the door.

It was a small room, also bare of furniture, except for a cheap iron bed, one chair, and a wash-stand. The bed was made; on the wash-stand stood a basin full of water. By its side was a pitcher and one towel.

"Everything's ready, you see," said Hetheridge, with a return of his bluff good-fellow manner. "Now you can wash and spruce up, and by the time you've done dinner will be on the table down-stairs. I'll call you when it is."

With that he went away. The orphan, left to himself, began an inspection of his quarters with a minuteness which he could scarcely explain to himself.

He found a window, in the front of the house, opening on the path by which he had just come. The top of it was only a few inches below the lower edge of the roof, along which ran a gutter. Along the lower edge of the window, and to some distance on either side, ran a ledge about six inches wide.

The other three sides of the room were without windows—bare, also, of any sort of decoration, even wall-paper.

Pursuing his tour of inspection, the boy found on the inside of the room's door a heavy bolt; this, for some reason as yet not avowed to himself, was a relief. Then, continuing his investigation to the outer side of the door—the side on the narrow corridor along which he had just been piloted—he found another bolt. But, whereas the one on the inside was rusty, this one was black and shiny, as if only recently placed there.

Looking at it closely, the boy noted that the paint on the portions of the door adjacent to it had been chipped off, showing the raw wood beneath; the heads of the screws, too, were bright. There was no doubt about it—the bolt on the outside of the door had just been put on.

Roland stood a moment, reflectively. Then he reentered the little room. As he did so he caught the sound of footsteps in the room beneath—the one which he had found locked.

Still impelled by feelings not as yet analyzed, he crouched down and tried to peek through the boards. In a few seconds he found a crack which afforded a circumscribed but clear view of the room below.

He caught a glimpse of Hetheridge, a candle in his hand, a can of something in the other. He was pouring some liquid from the can on a mass that lay piled about the room, so high

in spots that it seemed to reach the ceiling. As the candle flickered uncertainly, this mass looked now like mattresses and pillows, now like sacking, now like hay or straw and heaped-up branches.

Then the candle seemed to go out, the footsteps receded, and a faint smell as of kerosene came through the crack.

Roland scrambled to his feet and began dusting off his knees. He sat down on the edge of the iron bed. His brow contracted as if from deep thought.

"Dinner!" shouted Hetheridge from down-stairs.

Jumping up, the boy washed in lightning haste, ran a brush through his hair, and ran out of the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHAOS.

THE dining-room was in keeping with the rest of the house. It was graced with a table, two chairs, and nothing else. The table was set for two.

Hetheridge was already seated at one end of it. Beside him was a bottle of whisky. Roland took the other chair. Hetheridge helped him to cold ham from a dish in front of him and poured the boy a cup of coffee. Then he poured himself a drink of whisky and lifted the glass.

"Your health," he growled, gulping the whisky down. Roland sipped water. Then both attacked the ham. For a while there was silence in the room.

Roland was thinking hard. His dislike for Hetheridge, conceived at the moment of their meeting in the New York hotel, was now transforming itself into active suspicion—suspicion of what he could not exactly say. The lonely, barely furnished house, the mysterious front room with the locked door, Hetheridge's strange actions among its strange contents, the bolt just placed on the outer side of the door up-stairs—all was well calculated to foster suspicion. And while he ate his cold ham and sipped his coffee, the boy found himself concocting plans to escape from this house in the solitary woodland and from the rough man who had brought him there.

How? He did not know as yet, but of one thing he felt sure. Under no circumstances must he let Hetheridge guess that he suspected that anything was amiss.

He glanced furtively at the man. Hetheridge was pouring himself a second and stronger drink of whisky.

Then suddenly, in obedience to a plan which he had been forming, the boy rose.

"Mr. Hetheridge," said he, "I'm tired, and I'm going to turn in. All I wanted was just a bite. It has been a hard day for me, you know. Good night."

Hetheridge, pouring himself still another drink, looked up with a flash of something like suspicion in his eyes. Before he could do or say anything, Roland was out of the room and on the way to the stairs. Half-way up, he turned; Hetheridge was at the dining-room door, looking after him dubiously.

"Good night, Mr. Hetheridge."

"Good night."

Roland entered the little room assigned to him. Before lighting a light he went over to the window and looked out. He smiled at what he saw—Hetheridge, outside, in front of the house, looking up at the window.

"Thought I was going to jump out, did he?" muttered the boy. "Oh, no!"

Then he undressed, tied his clothes tightly in a bundle, donned his pajamas, and went down-stairs again.

Hetheridge was standing just inside the front door, as if watching. At sight of the pajama-clad boy his face cleared, as if he were relieved.

"I came down to ask you what time we start for the city to-morrow, Mr. Hetheridge."

"Oh—we—why, we start at seven thirty," replied Hetheridge briskly. "I'll call you. Go to sleep now and don't worry. Good night."

As if reassured about something, he went back into the dining-room, poured himself another drink, and again attacked his ham and coffee, which he had not half finished.

Roland went up-stairs slowly. But from the head of the stairs to his room he dashed at top speed in his bare feet. Once in his room, he bolted the door, and, still moving with the utmost swiftness of which he was capable, he snatched up his bundle of clothes, darted to the window, and swung himself outside it.

Holding to the gutter along its upper edge and standing on the ledge, he flung the bundle up over the edge of the roof. Then, throwing one leg over the gutter, he hoisted himself after it to the roof.

It rose in the middle to a peak. Picking the bundle from where it lay in the gutter, Roland scrambled over the peak and lay crouched on the other side of it, invisible from the front of the house.

The whole maneuver had taken scarcely a minute. Peering cautiously over the peak toward the front of the house, the boy waited.

It was a black night—no moon or stars relieved it. All about lay the stretches of scrub and woodland, sunk in silence and darkness. Crouched in an uncomfortable posture, Roland waited for something like an hour, so far as he could judge, before anything happened.

Then he heard creaking noises from inside the house.

Shifting his body cautiously, so as to make no sound, Roland, looking about, spied a small skylight behind him. Just as he put his face to it a candle's light illuminated the space on the other side, and the boy saw that it gave upon the narrow corridor leading to the room where he was to have spent the night.

The light grew brighter. Roland drew back cautiously, but kept his eyes fixed on the corridor. He saw Hetheridge, again carrying a candle, swing into the lighted space from the stairway and advance slowly along the corridor.

The man was barefooted, and approached on tiptoe. Passing directly under the skylight whence he was being so closely observed, he stopped before the door of Roland's room, stood there for a few seconds, as if listening, and then, very gently, tried the door.

Then, still with great caution, he shot the bolt on the outer side of the door and turned away. In the sudden flicker of the candle-light Roland saw the man's face, red with drink, his eyes glowering cruelly.

The boy fell back out of the circle of light, terrified. It seemed impossible that he had not been perceived from below. But as nothing happened he was soon back at his post, peering over the roof-peak, waiting.

He had not long to wait. From below came presently a strange, crackling sound, then smoke forced its way through cracks and window. Then the whole countryside seemed to be lighted up by a red burst of flame from the house below.

Crouching still on the roof, Roland saw Hetheridge, out in front of the house, gazing up at the window of the little front room. In his hand he held something bright; now it looked like a revolver, now like a knife.

A tongue of flame shot through the roof within a few feet of Roland, followed by a black belch of smoke—another ate its way out on the other side of him.

Slipping down to the edge of the roof at the rear of the house, the boy peered over. Below was a patch of grass; beyond, a few hundred yards away, was a dense clump of woods.

For a moment he hesitated. A whole section of the roof leaped into flame; black clouds of smoke surged

up amid the crackle of the fire. Casting the bundle of clothes ahead of him, Roland leaped over the edge of the low roof, landing in a heap on the soft grass. He was on his feet in an instant. Picking up his bundle, he ran like a deer for the woods, while from the house, lying between him and the watcher at its front, twisting pillars of flame shot up. As he ran, Roland could hear rafters and walls crash to ruin in the flames, but he did not look back.

Gaining the woods, he flung himself down, panting, and then only did he turn his head.

The fire had done its work with appalling celerity. The house now seemed to consist of the ground floor only, so ravenously had the flames eaten into it.

And while the boy lay on his stomach in the woods, watching, terror-stricken, and mute, the fire ate to the very vitals of the flimsy frame structure; the house vanished abruptly from before his eyes and, out of a chaos of sullen flame and smoke, he saw the figure of Hetheridge, standing erect beside the ruin, with something bright in his hand.

For hours Roland lay in the woods, shaking with horror, his eyes glued to the ruin that had been destined as his tomb. For hours he lay, scarcely stirring, while the last flames rose from the black ashes and the last clouds of smoke floated away.

Dawn came. He saw men gather round the figure of Hetheridge; he could see them gesticulating excitedly, moving about among the still glowing embers.

But Roland did not stir. His limbs seemed robbed of the power of movement, his brain of the power of thought. He simply lay prone on the ground, sick with the horror of the death he had escaped — as yet no thought of vengeance crossed his mind.

Then he sat up.

Of a sudden it seemed that fear and horror had been stripped from him. Boy though he was, a curiously mature smile spread over his features. It seemed as if his night of terror had aged and ripened him. Still keeping himself concealed, he crawled to the edge of the patch of woods in which he had lain through the night and looked out long and earnestly toward the ruined house and the men hovering around it—there were rural firemen on the spot now with their antiquated apparatus.

As he looked he smiled again, while he half said, half thought:

"So this was your kindness, Uncle David? This was your way of teaching me to be a business man? You wanted to kill me, did you? You—"

He stopped suddenly.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I'm as good as dead—if I want to be!"

For a while he thought in silence. Then he stood up, a strange figure there in the woods, with his pajamas, and all dusty and tousled. He shook his fist toward the smoking ruins and cried aloud:

"I'll get my revenge, Uncle David—in my own time and my own way!"

Then he hastily untied his bundle of clothes, donned them over his pajamas, and set off at a brisk pace through the woods in the opposite direction from the charred débris of the house.

That night he took a train for New York from a station on another railroad line, fifteen miles from where he had alighted with Hetheridge the night before.

Next day he shipped as cabin-boy on a vessel bound from New York to China.

CHAPTER IX.

GETTING UNDER WAY.

In the office of a highly respectable London bank a young man was industriously adding up figures. Bent almost double over his desk, his eyes never strayed to any of his co-

workers at other similar highly respectable desks.

He was a perfect picture of concentrated industry. Teachers might have drawn their texts from him; the busy bee—if that offensively absorbed insect ever gets tired—might find renewed inspiration in contemplating this young man.

He was a fair-haired, gray-eyed, good-looking young man, and even the rows of figures before him could not rob him of a captivating smile.

Minutes passed, and still he added. About him other clerks like himself added up other rows of figures, or—if they were managers, assistant managers, or partners in the highly respectable firm—did whatever such august personages do. (What is it, after all, but adding up figures?)

For fully fifteen minutes the young man did not once look up from his sheet of paper. Then, with a satisfied little smile, he allowed his eyes to stray casually to the calendar hanging on the wall. Dropping his pen suddenly, he sat up in his chair and gazed at the calendar intently.

"March second," he muttered under his breath; "ten years ago to-day." And then: "My boy, the time has come!"

After which cryptic and somewhat melodramatic utterance he lowered himself from his high stool on which he had been so industrious and, threading his way amid the high stools of still laboring clerks, he presented himself before the manager of that particular department of the bank.

"Mr. Green," he said, "I am sorry to say that I must resign my position here. I must return to my home—America."

Mr. Green, who was a decidedly amiable-looking chap, seemed much taken back.

"But, my dear Mr. Grelthorpe," he objected, "aren't you satisfied here?"

"Perfectly."

"If an increase in salary—"

"No, Mr. Green; it isn't that. I have been treated like a king here, but I must sail for America."

"Well, I'm sorry." The manager seemed to mean exactly what he said—which isn't true by any means of most people who use the formula "I'm sorry."

Roland Grelthorpe shook hands most cordially with Mr. Green, and a moment later was walking down Cannon Street, hands in his pockets, and whistling an air which he had neatly adapted to the words:

> Ten years is long enough,
> Ten years is long enough.

Tiring of that, he stopped his tune and said half aloud: "Uncle David—on guard!"

Yes, Roland Grelthorpe it was, gaily walking down Cannon Street in the city of London on that early spring day ten years after the night on which he had escaped from Hetheridge and the burning house in the Long Island woods. They had been ten years of peril and variety, which had made of him a well-set-up youth of twenty-six, with the sort of eye that looks as if no such thing as an unexpected emergency could possibly arise.

Roland Grelthorpe, in those ten years, had been cabin-boy and able seaman, railroad hand and soldier, stevedore and clerk. He had seen Asia and Africa and South America as they really are; he was at home in the tea-houses of Nagasaki, among the sampans of Hong-Kong, in the wicked alleyways of Tangier, and the sun-steeped ports of the Caribbean. He had loaded ships at Liverpool all day and studied at night-school half the night; he had toiled in the mines of the Arctic Circle in Sweden, peddled on the highroads of Germany, waited on tables in little cafés on the boulevards of Paris.

And everywhere, penniless or prosperous, he had managed to keep track of the career of David Grelthorpe. Reading grimy newspapers while the boss of the moment was not looking,

eagerly conning society sheets tossed aside by American tourists, he had followed his uncle's arduous road to social eminence and licked his lips at the revenge which he promised himself.

All his wanderings, he told himself, had that revenge as a reason; every bit of knowledge which he picked up he looked upon as something that made him better qualified to wreak it. And now that he had given himself ten years of probation and allowed his uncle ten years to consolidate himself in the life that he loved above all else on earth, he thanked his stars for the thousandth time that he had had the patience and fortitude so to wait—that he had not, while yet a boy, denounced David Grelthorpe and punished him before the stolen millions had become the magic wand wherewith to realize his pet ambition.

"Most vengeances," soliloquized the youth as he walked past St. Paul's Cathedral, "consist merely of one big sword-thrust that lays the victim out with scarcely any pain. How much better, from the victim's point of view, to suffer that way than by the sort of vengeance I contemplate—not one sword-thrust, but one thousand pin-pricks. The pin is mightier than the sword!"

The sally pleased him so much that he repeated it right out loud, to the surprise of several passers-by.

"On to vengeance!" he added. "On to America!"

Whereupon he fumbled through his pockets and found that he possessed an aggregate of about three pounds sterling.

"Whew!" he muttered. "That makes New York and vengeance look a long way off!"

But Roland and worry were not in the habit of hobnobbing. One hour later he emerged from a chop-house in the Strand, fortified by a meal of chops and ale and ready for anything that London might have to offer.

"Let me see," he mused. "To-day is Tuesday—the Mauretania sails for New York to-morrow. Perhaps I shall be lucky enough to find enough for my passage on her; perhaps I shall have to sink to steerage on a slow boat—but, anyhow, a mysterious something informs me that London will this night provide thee with thy passage money, Roland, my boy."

He strolled across Trafalgar Square, through Piccadilly, into the aristocratic streets of the West End, smoking a cigarette and observing the life of the world's greatest city with a lazy interest. In this way the hours passed until the night was well along, and Roland, coming to a grand mansion, found a ball in full swing.

Strains of dance music floated through the windows to the street; before the door a crowd of chauffeurs, coachmen, footmen, and nondescripts, with a sprinkling of policemen, sought to catch a glimpse of the dancers enjoying themselves on the other side of the portal.

As Roland appeared on the scene the big front door flew open. A man, evidently impelled with great violence from within, shot out like an uncouth missile, slipped on the top step of the short flight leading to the street, and rolled head over heels to the sidewalk. The door was slammed shut. The crowd, which now included Roland, gathered about the apparition.

It picked itself up and gazed about with a quizzical smile. It was a man, dressed in ragged and motley garb and in dire need of a shave. But he seemed perfectly at ease.

"Concise," he muttered, "and to the point. No frills, no red tape. Bravo! Ejection, if practised at all, should possess one leading characteristic. It should eject."

He turned to the crowd quite confidentially. "You are fortunate in having seen what I consider a classic among ejections," he vouchsafed.

Nobody could think of anything to say. They stood about, grinning. The man who had been propelled so violent-

ly from within bestowed a particularly mellow smile on a policeman who seemed to be harboring hostile designs on him, thus disarming that individual completely, and then, striding suddenly up to Roland, calmly inserted a finger in the buttonhole of his coat and inquired:

"Who are you?"

Roland just smiled. The other, reaching in his pocket, produced a salted almond.

"Have a nut," he said. "Nibble with abandon until your hunger is gone, and then I will reward you by telling you the story of my life."

Roland good-naturedly put the almond in his mouth.

"Ha! now there is a bond between us," ejaculated the ejected party, much gratified. "It is not everybody who has received a salted almond at the hands of Professor Copernicus. Come, brother, let us eschew this throng. In it are many doubtless meritorious people, but I wish to hold no converse with them. I see no embryo Dantes, no budding Immanuel Kants."

Slipping his arm through Roland's, he drew him away, followed by the smiles and chuckles of the crowd.

"Fear me not, youth," he pursued; "I am always docile on Tuesdays in the early spring. My name, as I remarked, is Copernicus, except on Thursdays after four, when it is H. Balthazar Dreadnought. And, by the way, do I bore you? I frequently bore myself. Have a nut."

He presented a walnut. Roland took it.

"Ha!" said his eccentric companion; "now you simply must hear my story. It invariably follows the concatenation of one salted almond and one walnut."

His extraordinary flow of language pleased the young man's mood.

"Tell me your story," he urged.

"Certainly," said the other. "First, I am very wise. Second, I am a blamed fool. Third, I have been everywhere, done everything, and acquired all knowledge except that of overcoming one weakness.

"Strange"—he lowered his voice to sepulchral depths—"that one like me, who calls the stars by their first names, should yearn fiercely for—what do you suppose? To see the inside workings of a genuinely swell function—a warranted élite ball—a *soirée* of the *crême de la crême*.

"You saw me pirouette just now down yonder steps. It was the ninth time in seven months. I had penetrated as far as the dining-room, surrounded by lovely women and whole platoons of very distinguished though angry men, and had just seized a handful of nuts—have one—when—what's the matter?"

Roland had stopped in his walk and was eying his companion with sudden deep interest.

"You are just the man I want," he said. "Will you come to America with me?"

"Sorry, but as a swimmer—" began the other man.

Roland continued: "Come with me, and I'll promise to get you into as grand a function as you could ever hope to see and—what is infinitely more important—guarantee that you are not thrown out!"

"Oh, cricky!" The other was rendered speechless for a moment. "It will seem as if something vital were lacking," he murmured half to himself. Then, in an awed whisper, he asked:

"When do we start?"

"As soon as I can raise the price. How much have you?"

"Three shillings. And you?"

"Three pounds."

The uncouth one sat down suddenly on the curb and buried his face in his hands.

"'Twas ever thus," he groaned. "Leave me. I don't want you to see a strong man weep."

"But wait a while," protested Roland. "Something may turn up."

His companion put his hands to his

mouth megaphone-wise and bellowed: "Something! Something, come here! Something! Turn up!"

He put his ear to the sidewalk and listened eagerly for a bit. Then he shook his head disconsolately:

"There is no justice," he sighed. "But—hark!—heavenly music."

They had come to another mansion where another ball was in progress.

Without a word the ragged one set out for the door.

"Where are you going?" cried Roland.

"To my fate," he replied.

Laughing, Roland drew into the semidarkness of an areaway some little distance from the door and awaited further developments.

Just as he drew back two men emerged from the ball in full evening dress. Together they descended the steps and started along the street.

Directly in front of Roland they stopped, while one held a match to the other's cigarette. Their conversation came plainly to his ears.

"Allow me to give you my card," said the one closest to the man concealed in the areaway. "I'm Henry Hollingsford, of Columbus, Ohio. You know, it's been a great honor for me to meet an English nob—I never did before."

The other laughed deprecatingly, while the man from Ohio took the card from the inside of his light overcoat. Then a strange thing happened.

"Look—isn't that a perfectly wonderful sky?" said the man with the American all of a sudden.

His companion looked up. As he did so the other, with a movement so deft and rapid as to be almost invisible, reached into Hollingsford's overcoat, extracted the card-case, and slipped it into his own pocket.

"A most beautiful sky indeed," said the American with enthusiasm, and then: "Couldn't you come along with me? We might have a bite—"

But the other excused himself, shook hands, and walked away.

Hardly had he done so before excited voices came from the direction of the mansion's door, followed suddenly by the apparition of Professor Copernicus rolling down the steps to the street. Roland, rushing from his hiding-place, set him on his feet, and, without waiting to hear a word, pointed excitedly to the receding figure of the American.

"Follow that man!" he exclaimed. "Find out where he lives. Meet me here when you do."

"What's up?" asked the bewildered Copernicus.

"No matter. It means that we go to America. Quick, now!"

Copernicus set off at a gallop after the American, while Roland sped in the opposite direction, that taken by the man who had appropriated the card-case.

He had to walk briskly for a block or so before he saw him of his quest striding along quite as if he were the most blameless young swell in London. Roland kept some paces behind him till they were in a dark stretch of street fringed with residences, from which no light shone. Then, bounding forward, he barred the other's way, seized him by the collar, pinioned both his arms, and hissed:

"Give me that card-case you stole."

The other was too thunderstruck to say or do anything; he just stood there, powerless in the young man's grasp. Releasing one of his hands, Roland stuck it into the youth's pocket and took out the card-case. Then he gave his captive a push.

"Get out!"

The thief slouched away, swaying as if his knees refused to do their work. He disappeared round a corner without so much as looking back. His assailant, retracing his steps to where he had parted with Copernicus, found the latter walking up and down in a wild state of excitement.

"An adventure! I am involved in an adventure!" he was exclaiming to himself.

As soon as he saw Roland he blurted out:

"Hotel Cecil! He lives at the Hotel Cecil!"

"Good!" said Roland. For the first time he looked into the card-case and smiled happily. In it were four one-hundred-pound notes—two thousand dollars—and two twenty-pound notes.

"Hurrah!" said Roland.

"What does that mean?"

"That we are going to America."

"Sudden, but satisfactory," commented Copernicus. "This is the kind of adventure I like. No preliminaries, no explanations, no logic. Perfect! And, oh, by the way, young man, before our acquaintance progresses any further I wish to tell you something. It had almost slipped my mind. How very careless of me."

"What is it?"

"I am not crazy."

"I didn't think you were," said Roland politely.

"Then I fear for your sanity," observed his new acquaintance.

"Permit me a question," said Roland—"one that you have already asked me—who are you?"

"Ho, ho, we grow personal! We impinge!" remarked Copernicus.

And he shut up like an oyster. To all Roland's further remarks he replied only in monosyllables or by lavishing praise on the weather.

That night at his lodgings Roland Grelthorpe took from the card-case of Mr. Hollingsford, of Columbus, Ohio, two twenty-pound notes, and, wrapping up the rest very carefully, mailed it to that gentleman at the Hotel Cecil with a note, reading:

> Less two hundred dollars commission. Needed to repatriate the finder, an American.

Three days later he and Professor Copernicus shipped for the United States in the steerage of an Atlantic liner.

Three weeks from the date of their windfall they presented themselves at the door of the Grelthorpe domicil in New York and turned the culminating night in the fortunes of David Grelthorpe into a night of catastrophe.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER A BRIDE.

And now, less than a month after they had quit Europe as steerage passengers, with only a few dollars in their pockets, Roland Grelthorpe and Professor Copernicus were first-cabin passengers on one of the most *recherché* of ocean liners.

Their pockets were well lined with David Grelthorpe's money. They seemed to look upon the world and its inhabitants with great approval.

The liner was feeling her way along the approach to Hamburg amid the myriad vessels that converge at that greatest of German seaports. The professor was leaning back in a deck-chair with his feet on the rail. No longer poorly garbed, his raiment had unquestionably gained in eccentricity.

His coat was a loud check, his trousers a little louder, his waistcoat an aggressive yellow. His tie emulated the rainbow; his shirt shouted to the heavens; his scarf-pin sought to drown the shirt's voice. But, anyhow, he had had a shave at most twenty-four hours before.

Roland was seated beside him in another deck-chair, smoking a cigarette. The professor looked at the approach to Hamburg lazily and patronizingly.

"Youth," he remarked after a while, "there are two theories as to just what the height of insouciance is. One says that it is to stand with your fingers in the armholes of your waistcoat and twiddle your thumbs at your neighbors. The other—which I consider the correct one—has it that the height of insouciance consists in putting your feet on the rail of an ocean liner and twiddling your toes at the universe. What think you, my boy?"

Roland laughingly blew smoke-rings.

"For the one hundred and tenth time, professor," he said, "who and what are you?"

Copernicus contemplated his foot, shod in a half-black, half-tan shoe, with a rich design worked into the leather and surmounted by a magnificent bow.

"To change the subject," he observed quietly, "how beautiful the approach is to Hamburg — so alive, so absorbing, so expressive of this stormy present-day life of ours."

Roland laughed aloud.

"No use, I see, professor."

"None whatever. The German sky — how blue — like Gretchen's eyes. Ever read 'Faust'?"

"No."

"Do! Highly satisfactory piece of work. And, by the way, what is the next step in your eccentric vengeance?"

"Search me!"

Copernicus crossed his legs and transferred his attention to his other foot.

"I am glad that you don't know," he went on. "If there's one thing I hate in this world it is premeditation. It has ruined many a plan. What I like best about you is your lack of it."

"Thanks! I'll tell you this much—I wireless'd to Miss Claire Grelthorpe's bankers here, asking her exact whereabouts—you know her father said he thought she was in Copenhagen. They answered that she and a friend, a Miss Lithgow, had gone to Elsinore, which is a short way from Copenhagen, to spend a week sketching Hamlet's castle, Hamlet's grave, and other Hamlet articles which, they tell me, infest Elsinore."

"So we are bound thither?"

"Exactly—and I more than suspect that we'll meet an acquaintance of yours there, professor."

"The same being—"

"Lord Lastermere."

"I suppose so. After what old Dave Grelthorpe offered him, he'll probably lose no time in wooing the fair millionairess? Going to try your hand at it?"

"Of course."

"Perhaps I will, too. No telling what I can do if I once get the Lothario fever. Many years ago in Ceylon a lovely maid, overcome by furious admiration for me, said: 'Arbuthnot—'"

"O-ho! So your name is Arbuthnot?"

"Did I say that? Strange! I meant Dalhousie—funny what tricks the human tongue will play. She said: 'Dalhousie, I love you.' I said: 'Trincomalee, I love *you*.'

"Then, just as we were about to plight our troth, a cyclone sprang up and separated us forever. It blew her southeast, me northwest. At the memory I invariably sigh thrice. Look—yonder is Hamburg!"

Hamburg indeed it was, many-spired, throbbing with activity.

Roland and his resplendent companion, having been despatched by the German customs officials, ascertained that there was an express for the Danish capital in an hour and hastened to the central station. Just as they had found places in a first-class compartment and the whistle of the engine had tooted, signifying that it was impatient to be on its way, a dapper young man dashed along the platform, followed by a porter carrying two suit-cases.

The dapper young man hurled himself into a compartment next that occupied by Roland and his friend. The porter tumbled the suit-cases in after him. On them, in large letters, Roland read the words: "Lord Lastermere."

To pay the porter the young man leaned from the window. Roland took a long look at his face. Then he whistled softly:

"Well, well!" he muttered. "This is going to be easier than I expected."

Arrived at Copenhagen, Roland surprised his traveling companion by showing no special eagerness to pur-

sue his plans of vengeance on his uncle. Instead of pushing on to Elsinore, as Copernicus expected he would, the young man idled amid the sights of the Danish capital, which is one of the few cities that smile upon the stranger as if genuinely pleased to see him.

"Plenty of time," Roland would reply to the expostulations of Copernicus, who had suddenly become transformed into a man of action. "I want to give Lord Lastermere a good start in his wooing. Then the joy of discomfiting him will be so much the keener."

"But suppose he gets such a good start in the young damsel's affections that you can't discomfit him?"

Roland smiled confidently.

"My dear professor, discomfiting Lord Lastermere is going to be the easiest thing in the world."

"How do you know?"

"No matter."

The professor shook a solemn finger at the youth.

"Hannibal, do not dally too long in Capua."

"Don't worry."

Realizing that further admonitions would be useless, Professor Copernicus got up and announced that he was going to spend the day in the National Museum.

"Why?" inquired Roland.

"Most interesting collection of old viking stuff there," replied Copernicus. "Didn't you know that the vikings and the sagas and all that sort of thing were hobbies of mine? My monograph, entitled—" He suddenly checked himself, picked up his hat, bowed solemnly, and was gone.

On the morning of the third day in Copenhagen Roland told his companion that he intended to go to Elsinore at noon.

"About time," growled the man of mystery. "By the way, how do you know that the bird hasn't flown?"

"Her bankers told me this morning that she will stay at least a week more there. And now kindly run your eye over this letter. I think it neat and nephewly."

Copernicus took from Roland's hand a sheet of paper and read this:

MR. DAVID GRELTHORPE,
New York.,
DEAR UNCLE DAVID:

I am off to Elsinore to woo your daughter Claire. In my next letter I hope to report that we are engaged. I felt it only right to tell you, as I knew how pleased you would be. Too bad you wasted all that good money on Lord Lastermere. He is in Elsinore, but he hasn't the ghost of a show.

Your affectionate nephew,
ROLAND.

P. S.—As funds are running low, you might cable me a couple of thousand more to tide me over while I am winning the heiress's hand. You won't mind, will you? Professor Copernicus is well, and speaks most highly of your delightful hospitality in New York.

"I think that will make him writhe," commented Copernicus; "also snort and prance."

"I think so, too," agreed Roland.

Agreeing to meet Copernicus at Copenhagen at the end of the week, he took the train for Elsinore.

The railway from Copenhagen to Elsinore is a nice railway. It hugs the strand of the island of Zealand, passing the Dyrehave, where herds of deer browse quite scornful of the engine, and all the way you can get pretty glimpses of the sound, dotted with sails and smoke-clouds, and of the coast of Sweden, just over the way to the north.

Also, there are many cows with amiable faces, and many serene little villages, and many pleasant Danes of both sexes walking or driving along many pleasant ribbony roads; and the conductor who inspects your ticket is unintelligible, but ever so glad to have you round, and everybody high and low beams on you with or without provocation—it is a very nice railway.

Roland smiled back at every smile, puffed at a pipe, and decided that he disagreed violently with *Hamlet's* assertion that something was "rotten in the state of Denmark."

"I'm afraid *Hamlet* was a grouch," he soliloquized.

Whereupon the train, which had been stopping at every back door for an hour or so with delightful leisureliness, came to a particularly final sort of stop, somebody bawled "*Helsingor!*" and Roland was startled into realizing that that must be Elsinore in Danish.

It was.

He walked from the station into a neat, white town, with a pocket edition of a harbor and a water-front, pretending to be awfully busy, the whole dominated by the Kronborg, at which Roland gazed with becoming reverence, for was it not *Hamlet's* Castle, where Shakespeare made the melancholy Dane ponder and declaim and perish? Why, there before him was the very Flag Battery on which the ghost of *Hamlet's* father used to appear! Roland felt very literary.

He also felt very hungry. Spying a likely looking hostelry labeled "Hotel Banegaard," he entered and ordered lunch. The proprietor in person, seemingly favorably impressed with Roland, skipped hither and yon in his service, blithely smiling.

"Speak English?" inquired Roland.

"Yes, sir." (Danes are born with a knowledge of from two to seven foreign languages.)

"Is Miss Grelthorpe staying here?"

"Yes, sir—with Miss Lithgow."

"And Lord Lastermere?"

"He also. Do you know him?"

"Slightly."

Roland's stock rose with a leap. The Dane became loquacious.

"The young ladies have been here a week. The young lord has been here two days. They walk. They drive. They sketch. They row. They Kronborg. He makes the eye. Very sweet."

Then the landlord bent down close to Roland, looking very sly, and vouchsafed:

"You know—I tenk Lord Lastermere and Miss Grelthorpe, they get marry."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. His eye—tremendous!"

Lunch was brought. As Roland sat doing it ample justice, two young ladies entered the room, laughing and chatting in English with a young man. Roland bent over his plate.

CHAPTER XI.

A DEPARTURE.

THE two girls and their escort took luncheon all together at a table not far from that occupied by Roland; a lunch of gay laughter and chatter. One of the girls was small and fair and pretty, the other tall, dark, and strikingly beautiful. Roland wondered which might be his cousin, the daughter of David Grelthorpe.

At first nothing in the conversation going on in the gay group served to enlighten him—it was just a succession of jokes and chaffing. But eventually the young man, turning to the tall and dark member of the party, addressed her as "my dear Miss Grelthorpe." The mystery was solved.

When they had finished their meal the two girls rose and went out of the dining-room, leaving their companion to smoke a cigar in solitude. Roland was just about to make friendly overtures to him when the young man spared him the trouble by walking over to where Roland was seated, holding out a cigar.

"Have a smoke?" he said in a most cordial voice.

Roland took the proffered cigar.

"I say, you're an American, aren't you?" Roland nodded. "Thought so as soon as I saw you just now. It's a treat to speak English with a man again. Haven't done it since I left London four days ago. Let me introduce myself—I'm Lord Lastermere."

"Indeed!" Roland's voice sounded quite awed. "I am James Henshaw," he announced. "Do you know—I never met a lord before—I feel greatly honored, Lord Lastermere."

The nobleman waved a deprecating hand.

"Are you making a tour of Europe?" he inquired.

"Yes, my first," replied Roland, with sudden and voluble mendacity, "and I can tell you that I'm about sick of it. If it wasn't for ma and pa I'd stick in Paris the whole time—say, but that's the real winner of a place. The trouble is that ma and pa want me to improve my mind, whatever that is, so they've mapped out a regular whale of a tour for me, all full of art galleries and cathedrals and ruins and all sorts of horrible things.

"I'm on my way to meet them now—at Christiania—they've been taking in the North Cape; thank goodness, I escaped that!—and I simply don't dare face them and tell them that I didn't take a look at this darned *Hamlet's* Castle here. You see, if they get mad at me there'll be no more spondoolicks from pa."

"Spon—what?"

"Spondoolicks. Money. Gold. The precious wherewithal. Savvy?" Roland was certainly the recklessly slangy young American with a vengeance. "As long as I behave myself—and as long as I don't, provided pa don't get wise—he simply buries me in money. Do you know how much I've got with me now?"

"How much?"

Roland sunk his voice to a confidential whisper.

"Five thousand dollars."

"Gracious!" The nobleman seemed quite overwhelmed. Roland leaned back, apparently pleased with the effect he had made.

"Mr. Henshaw," said Lord Lastermere pleasantly, "now that you're here, let me show you the sights of Elsinore. Think of how pleased your father and mother will be if you tell them that you've not only seen *Hamlet's* Castle, but his grave. Let me take you there."

"Why, that's awfully kind of you, my lord," the American blurted out, his eyes shining with pleasure.

"Not at all. Ready to go now?"

"Sure!"

Lord Lastermere went to the hotel office and got the factotum there to procure a victoria. The two young men got into it and went bowling along the narrow and trim little streets of Elsinore, past its rows of fishermen's huts, out toward the open country.

After driving half an hour or so they came to a tiny park, at the gate of which the nobleman signed to Roland to alight. Telling the coachman to wait, they entered and walked up a steep path to a heap of stones surmounted by a cross and labeled "Hemlat's Grav."

"That's it," said Lord Lastermere, "or rather the Danes say that's it."

"How impressive!" chuckled Roland. "Say, this will make an awful hit with ma."

He sat down on a bench and contemplated the "grave"—why it is called the grave of *Hamlet* has not been satisfactorily elucidated to anybody; but then the name pleases tourists, and one of the chief aims of the Danes in life is to give pleasure.

"It's a sleepy afternoon, isn't it?" remarked Roland, "or else that beer I had for lunch has made me sleepy. I can hardly keep my eyes open."

He flung himself back on the bench, arms spread out, his coat unbuttoned. Gradually his head drooped.

"What's the matter with a little nap?" he murmured. As he spoke his head fell over completely to one side, his eyes closed.

Lord Lastermere looked at him closely. Then he sat down beside him on the bench. He waited for about ten minutes. Then, very cautiously, he stretched out one hand, put it into the inside pocket of Roland's coat, and

drew out a card-case protruding from it.

Roland's left hand, shooting suddenly from the other side of the bench, closed about the nobleman's wrist with a grip that made the other cry out with pain.

The eyes of the two met. He who had seemed to be asleep was now sitting bolt upright, wide awake. Never relaxing his hold on the guilty hand, he looked squarely into Lord Lastermere's eyes and snapped:

"Recognize me?"

The nobleman crumpled against the back of the bench. His face was pale with shame and pain; his eyes sought to elude those of his questioner.

"Don't you know me? Don't you remember Mr. Hollingsford, of Columbus, Ohio, and how you stole his money one night in London? Don't you remember how somebody got it away from you, you thief? Know me now?"

For a moment the other's eyes met Roland's and at once looked away again. Then he nodded his head and cried out again as he got another savage twist at his wrist.

"Listen, my lord," said Roland Grelthorpe, "it is now three o'clock. At four o'clock there is a train for Copenhagen. At eight there is one from there to Hamburg. Yet get out of Elsinore at four o'clock and out of Copenhagen at eight or I'll have you locked up. Do you understand?"

Lord Lastermere, all hunched up on the bench, nodded a sickly nod.

"You can take the carriage down there. I'll walk back to the hotel. Now get out! And, mind you—if I see your face here after four o'clock—"

Instead of finishing the sentence, he yanked the thief to his feet so violently that Lord Lastermere toppled over and fell prone on the hard stones of *Hamlet's* grave. He picked himself up instantly, and, without waiting even to brush himself off, scuttled down the steep pathway toward the carriage. In another minute Roland heard the sound of the carriage being driven rapidly away in the direction of Elsinore.

"Pretty easy!" he muttered to himself.

At half past four he walked into the hotel and was met by an astonished landlord.

"Your friend, Lord Lastermere, has gone — so suddenly!" sputtered the Dane.

"Yes, I know," said Roland. "I did my best to dissuade him, but it was useless. Will you please get me a cable-blank?"

The landlord bustled away and got it. Seating himself at a writing-desk, Roland wrote:

MR. DAVID GRELTHORPE,
New York.
Lord Lastermere has left Elsinore. Expect to propose to-morrow. Best love.

ROLAND.

CHAPTER XII.

VENGEANCE IS OFF.

JAMES HENSHAW, as Roland Grelthorpe elected to call himself at Elsinore, walked in the dining-room of the Hotel Banegaard at breakfast-time next morning just behind the pretty blond young lady and the statuesque brunette young lady who, he had learned, were Miss Lithgow and Miss Grelthorpe. At the door the former dropped her handkerchief.

Roland picked it up and returned it with a knightly bow. She smiled, he smiled, the other girl smiled, and — well, if that isn't enough for an introduction when three young Americans meet far from home in the midst of foreigners who are friendly but have an actively hostile language, why, there is something wrong with the laws of etiquette, and they should be repealed.

As the three breakfasted together the Danish landlord beamed on them, and nobody anywhere about was

shocked, and all was well in the best of all possible worlds.

"Of course, you'll let me go to walk with you," remarked Mr. Roland Grelthorpe, *alias* Henshaw. "Here I am, a helpless, deserted foreigner, and here you are, knowing all the ins and outs of this awful place, and you pretend that you're not going to show me over *Hamlet's* Castle! I never heard of such cruelty!"

"Well, I will if Claire won't," announced the little blonde with a most belligerent air. "I sympathize with you deeply, and so does she; but you must remember—the difference of my station and hers."

"The difference in your stations? Why, where do you get off?" inquired Roland impudently.

"No irreverence now. Don't you realize that she is Miss Claire Grelthorpe, daughter of one of the richest men in New York—".

"Oh, tut-tut, Rita!" objected her friend, lowering her eyes.

"I won't tut-tut! She, as I say, is the great heiress, Miss Grelthorpe, while I am her friend, recipient of her bounty, Miss Rita Lithgow, penniless daughter of a penniless father. Now, don't try to stop me!" She checked more admonitory gestures and mumbling sounds from her friend. "I will be grateful from the housetops. I will advertise your bounty from the market-place. Mr. Henshaw, don't you believe in gratitude?"

"Yes. It is most becoming."

"All men are alike," said the sprightly imp, with a note of deep sadness. "They think women mere *termini* for compliments. It gets to be an awful bore."

"Let's go for a walk, Rita," suggested her friend. "You overwhelm me with your bouquets. Come on."

"May I come?" persisted Roland.

"Of course."

So he fell in with them, and together, laughing and chatting as if they had been intimate for many a year, they sauntered along Elsinore's diminutive water-front until they found the little ferry that runs across the harbor to *Hamlet's* Castle. Together they entered the frowning gates of that edifice—the frown stops short at the gates—and explored its distinctly unwarlike and pleasant precincts.

Together they laughed at the solemn sign, "Keep away from the guns," which stands by the world-renowned Flag Battery where *Hamlet's* ghost appeared — the sign by which Denmark seeks to remind people that this peaceful-looking château is really a fortress designed to keep the world away if Denmark really gets angry.

Roland, who all the way had found immense entertainment in the irresponsible chatter of the little lady, decided now to attach himself to the queenly brunette. So he sidled up to her as they stood looking out over the sound toward the coast of Sweden, and asked:

"Have you read 'Hamlet'?"

"No," said she.

"She's an heiress. She doesn't have to," croaked her irrepressible friend. She just dodged a poke from a parasol. Roland turned on her in a flash.

"Have you read it?"

"Nope! Too poor. Father couldn't afford a copy," she answered with stupendous gravity.

"When you've been out sketching, have you done that pretty bit?" asked Roland, pointing out over the water toward a little island set in the midst of brilliant sunlight, around which bobbed fishermen's skiffs.

"Of course. That's Hven," said the blond girl; "the island where Tycho Brahe, the astronomer, did some of his best stunts in star-gazing."

"You are very learned," commented Roland.

"Have to be. I'm poor as a church mouse. Now, Claire over there doesn't have to know whether Tycho Brahe was an astronomer or a second-hand furniture dealer. Ah, me! Would I were rich! Mr. Henshaw, are you rich?"

"Not I," answered Roland.

"Then I shouldn't talk to you too much. I must be on the lookout for a rich husband. If you catch me wasting too much time in conversation with you, kindly reprove me. It really is wrong for me to do such things. And it's wrong for you, too. Don't fail to devote yourself to Claire. She's immorally rich, Claire is."

"Rita!"

Again the tall girl made after her friend, parasol upraised in laughing exasperation. The little one dodged without trouble, and arrived, panting, on the other side of Roland.

"So modest in spite of her wealth," she teased, getting protection by placing the youth as a buffer between herself and the parasol. "Beautiful to contemplate, such modesty, in these days of bloated peacock pride! Ouch!"

The exclamation was prompted by a jab of the parasol that caught her squarely in the ribs.

"Now, will you be good?"

"Yes. Honor bright!" The imp of mischief emerged from behind the young man, and the three sauntered toward the hotel without further hostilities. At the door the imp said, perfectly audibly, but quite as if Roland were nowhere about:

"Claire, you must invite the casual young American to lunch with us. If you do not it will look pointed and make him feel that he has intruded himself upon us. Never hurt a young man's feelings unless you are good and ready."

"Mr. Henshaw, will you take lunch with us?"

"Delighted!"

They sat down at a table by the window, in full view of the little harbor and the sunlit water-front, and again they laughed and bantered, and again the Danish landlord beamed on them.

Three days later Roland Grelthorpe walked into the hotel at Copenhagen where he and Professor Copernicus had stayed, and met that worthy seated in a comfortable chair, reading a fat volume. At sight of the young man Copernicus shut the book, leaped to his feet, and shook Roland's hand with wild enthusiasm.

"Well, my prodigal son," he exclaimed, "and how may your ducal health be?"

"Good! And yours?"

"Blooming, blooming without shame, right out in the open!" replied Copernicus. "How goes vengeance?"

"Vengeance has stopped for refreshment."

"And love?"

"Love begs to announce to its numerous friends that it has resumed its old job of making the world go round and hopes to be honored by their continued patronage."

"Come, now! Be serious. Have you met the beautiful Miss Grelthorpe and her friend, Miss Lithgow?"

"I have."

"Have you walked with them?"

"Yes."

"Moonlighted?"

"Yes."

"Rolled the eye amorous?"

"Yes."

"Won your lady-love's heart and proposed for her hand?"

"Yes."

"Congratulations!" roared Copernicus in tones that caused upward of sixteen persons to transfer their attention to him. "Congratulations, Lothario and Napoleon rolled into one! And which will be the happy day on which the lovely Miss Grelthorpe—"

"Hold on!" interjected Roland. "You're going too fast—"

"What do you mean?"

"I didn't propose to Miss Grelthorpe. I proposed to Miss Lithgow."

Copernicus bounded backward.

"And your beautiful plan of vengeance on your uncle?"

"All off," said Roland, a trifle shamefaced.

Copernicus collapsed into a chair.

"What fools these mortals be," he

groaned, "especially young male Americans!"

"Miss Lithgow accepted me," said Roland.

Professor Copernicus groaned.

"She has come down from Elsinore to Copenhagen to crack me up to her father, who has just arrived here. She feels sure that he will make no objections to our marriage."

Professor Copernicus groaned again.

"She doesn't care a snap that I'm a penniless—"

Professor Copernicus groaned a third time. He buried his face in his hands.

"Oh, cut out the sobs!" said Roland impatiently. "What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

His friend rocked backward and forward, as if quite overcome by the bitterness of his feelings.

"Such a beautiful vengeance!" he groaned. "Such an original, high-class vengeance to be thus nipped in the bud! Why, it was an honor to be associated with such a vengeance even in a humble capacity. Here were you, upsetting all the old theories of the game, coming not like the heroes of melodrama to discomfit the villain with scowls and bombast, but young and debonair, a smiling Nemesis! Oh, it was beautiful, beautiful! Excuse me if I die of a broken heart!"

"Listen!" interposed Roland, grasping his friend's shoulder and shaking him into a semiupright posture. "You mustn't think that I'm going to let Uncle David off so easy. I'll make him disgorge a million or so, and I'll surprise my *fiancée* with it on the day we are married."

"Ah, but the perfection of it — the subtle wickedness of marrying the villain's daughter!"

"Tut-tut! It wouldn't have been right—you know it wouldn't."

"Wicked things seldom are."

"I don't think I could have done it, no matter how revengeful I felt against Uncle David. And now that Miss Lithgow—"

"Boohoo!"

Again Roland shook his friend's shoulder, for the professor had apparently collapsed amid a storm of mock sobs, to the undisguised amusement of the other people about the lobby. Feigning a magnificent effort at self-control, Professor Copernicus sat up, pulled forth a huge yellow-and-red handkerchief, and passed it over his eyes.

The porter, two guests, and a bell-boy, unable to master their feelings any longer, snickered audibly. The proprietor suddenly disappeared to regions where he could explode unobserved.

"Anyhow, my mind is made up," continued Roland, yanking his friend to attention. "Rita—that's Miss Lithgow, my *fiancée*—has gone to meet her father at the Hotel Bristol and talk it all over with him. I expect a communication from old Lithgow any minute. As soon as I get it— Ha, here it is!"

A boy came up and handed Roland a note. Again Copernicus's head fell forward. His shoulders heaved as if their owner were a prey to utter despair. Sitting down beside him, Roland read:

> DEAR MR. HENSHAW:
>
> My daughter has told me of the proposal with which you have honored her. Will you be so kind as to come over to the Bristol to-morrow evening at nine. I should like to make your acquaintance, and I feel sure that we shall get along famously. Rita sends her love.
>
> Sincerely,
> JOHN LITHGOW.

"Looks as if it's all settled, eh, professor?"

Copernicus simply shook his head as he looked vacantly into space.

"Such a beautiful vengeance!" he groaned.

Next day he volunteered to accompany Roland to the Bristol and meet his *fiancée*. The young man, obviously ill at ease over the suggestion, cast a glance at his companion's eccentric

garments and generally flamboyant air. He could not conceal embarrassment. The other understood.

"Correct," he murmured, with a majestic wave of the hand. "To accompany you to the courts of Cupid would be to impinge. From my earliest infancy I have been taught not to impinge. My father was one of the greatest non-impingers that ever lived. Ta-ta, my boy! I go once more to saturate myself with the history of the estimable but ferocious vikings."

"Not offended, are you, professor?"

"Tralalala!" replied the professor, jigging toward the door.

He stayed away all the morning, all the afternoon, part of the evening. Just as the hotel clock was striking nine he reappeared in the apartments shared by him and Roland Grelthorpe.

As he entered the parlor his eye fell on the note from John Lithgow to his roommate, which Roland had left lying open on the table.

Something about it seemed to arrest Copernicus's attention. Walking over to the table, he took it up and looked at it closely.

Then he took from his pocket a seedy, old card-case, extracted from it a sheet of paper, ran his eye over some lines written on it, and then again glanced closely at the note to his friend. This operation he repeated several times.

The result was cataclysmal.

Jamming his hat over his eyes, he dashed out of the room, almost overturning a bell-boy in the corridor; took the stairway two steps at a time, and, appearing before the head porter like a cyclone, roared:

"Get me the swiftest taxicab in Denmark!"

Half a dozen hotel employees — grown men, youths, and boys — scattered in all directions to do his bidding.

A moment later he was dashing along the "Stroeg," that succession of narrow and cheerful thoroughfares that serve Copenhagen as a main street, in a taxicab that was certainly doing all it could to be the fleetest in Denmark, and ejaculating over and over again: "I must save him! I must save him!"

CHAPTER XIII.

OLD FRIENDS.

ROLAND had left his hotel at about half past eight. It was a fine evening, and there was plenty of time. So he didn't look for the fleetest taxicab in Denmark nor for any other vehicle, but wandered afoot along the Stroeg, humming and smiling his usual amiable smile.

He looked into the windows of many shops. He gazed at enormous cakes, composed mostly of butter, and wondered how the Danes could ever live five minutes after eating them.

He watched the big, red omnibuses go by, filled inside and on top, and paused several times to see whether a too daring cyclist would elude them. He—or she—always did. There is no place in the world like Copenhagen for bicyclists—judged both as to quantity and quality.

He flattened his nose against a show-window and admired the beautiful porcelain ware for which the Danish capital is famous. He stood on the Gammeltorv and wished that its old gables were peopled with storks *à la* Hans Christian Andersen, as they ought to be. In respectful astonishment he contemplated another tempting display in a cake vender's window —tempting, that is, to Danes—consisting of about three cubic yards of butter, almonds, butter, sugar, and butter.

And that brought him to the Raadhusplads. The Bristol Hotel is on the Raadhusplads. He went into that hostelry and made inquiry for Mr. John Lithgow.

At the sound of the name a very large man, incased in furs, his eyes covered by automobile goggles, advanced, touched his cap, and said:

"I am Mr. Lithgow's chauffeur. He was called unexpectedly to a villa which he has just hired in one of the suburbs. He instructed me to take you out there in his car, as he will be unable to get back to the city to-night. The car is at the door."

Sure enough, there was a fine car on the square outside. The chauffeur held the door open. Roland got in. Then the chauffeur leaped to the front seat and did whatever chauffeurs do to transform cars from peaceful pieces of furniture into ferocious honkers, sizzlers, and woof-woofers. They started gaily northward.

Little by little the solid rows of houses began to be broken by patches of open land. These intervals between houses grew larger and larger — evidently they were getting into the real open country.

Mr. John Lithgow's chauffeur, in spite of the fact that he was obviously an American, seemed to know his way like a native. He turned from the main road they had been following into a side road, shot off from that after a while into a sort of country lane, made a few more turns that served to knock out of Roland's head the little idea he had had of the direction in which they were traveling, and then suddenly drew up before a tiny country house. On both sides of it the open country stretched away, unbroken by any other habitation.

"This is Mr. Lithgow's place," said the begoggled individual on the front seat.

Roland alighted.

The chauffeur unlocked the door, and, stepping inside, switched on an electric light. Roland found himself in a room without a stick of furniture in it except for one lone chair. All the windows were closed tight.

"Mr. Lithgow must have just taken—" He half wheeled about toward the chauffeur and stopped in mid-sentence, struck dumb by what he saw.

The chauffeur stood with his back against the door by which he had entered. He had taken off his goggles and turned down the big fur collar of his coat which, up to then, had concealed almost all of his head.

Roland looked into two watery, shifty eyes — into a red and swollen face.

"Do you know me?" asked their owner, budging not an inch from his post by the door.

"Hetheridge!" gasped Roland.

Still keeping his back against the door, the red-faced man turned a key in the lock and pocketed the key. Then he favored Roland with a cold, shifting gaze.

"Yes, it's Hetheridge," he said. "Ten years since we met in that house on Long Island. Glad you remember me."

His eyes wandered from the young man's and wandered back.

"Ten years!" he continued. "You got away from me that time. You won't this time."

While he was speaking Roland had backed away until the full width of the room lay between him and Hetheridge. Fascinated, he kept his eyes glued on the man who ten years before had sought to burn him alive after the cruelest and blackest treachery—who now, Roland felt sure, could be at this lonely Danish country villa only for more evil.

"What are you doing here?" the young man asked huskily.

Hetheridge smiled a wicked smile. He licked his lips.

"Getting ready to kill you. Hadn't you guessed that?" He drew from his pocket a dark, ugly object about a foot long.

"What's that?" Roland found himself asking.

"A blackjack. A very good one." Hetheridge again smiled his wicked smile and twirled the ugly object in his hand. "One rap on the head ought to be enough. Much neater and easier than setting the place afire, ain't it?"

Their eyes met. Hetheridge's shift-

ed away. But he kept on smiling and licking his lips.

"How'd you get here?" asked Roland. He was leaning against the wall, watching Hetheridge's every move. Hetheridge did not stir from his post near the door of the room.

"Brought here by your dear Uncle David. Sailed from New York a couple of days after you did. Been watching you ever since. Didn't think you could get away with that revenge stuff, did you, without our interfering?"

For a moment there was silence. The two men watched each other. There was cruel anticipation in the eyes of the big, red-faced man by the door. Roland, braced against the wall, thought that an attack was coming the next second.

But he was wrong. Hetheridge suddenly relaxed his attitude, smiled, and observed:

"It's a very pretty game, your Uncle David's. Really, you ought to be proud of him. I'm in no special hurry, my boy, to murder you—the night is young—so I guess I'll tell you all about it."

He leaned against the locked door, twirling the weapon in his hand. Roland backed against the wall on the other side of the room. And then Hetheridge began to recount in a sneering monotone:

"The lady you call Miss Lithgow is Miss Claire Grelthorpe. And *vice versa*. Our little lady, Dave Grelthorpe's daughter, is a great joker. It has given her highness pleasure this year to pretend she was a penniless girl, and that her friend who was traveling with her was the heiress, Claire Grelthorpe. She fooled Lord Lastermere. She fooled you. Then she came down to Copenhagen and told her father all about it. Great, eh?"

"Do you mean to say that David Grelthorpe is in Copenhagen?"

"Sure! Didn't you get a note from him to come here?"

"Signed John Lithgow?"

"Exactly. Old Dave is a clever cove. After his daughter told him you thought she was Rita Lithgow — he knew, easy enough, that James Henshaw was you—Dave saw his chance.

"He looked me up—he had me in a near-by hotel because we thought there might be a little job in my line. That was yesterday. We spent hours dashing round the suburbs in a car with a real-estate agent, looking for a nice villa for my little job. We picked this one—neat and lonely. Old Dave hired it — said the suburbs of Copenhagen 'chawmed' him—simply 'chawmed' him—must send for his wife to spend a month here, and lots of that chatter. Haw-haw! Clever, eh?

"Then old Dave wrote that note to you and signed it John Lithgow. Pretty, eh?"

Roland gave no answer.

"And now," continued Hetheridge, "comes a murder."

He moved forward menacingly from his post by the door. Roland, with a sudden swoop, picked up the chair that was all the furniture in the room. Hetheridge stopped short.

"No use," he sneered.

"Come a step nearer and I'll brain you!"

"No use."

But Hetheridge's advance had been checked. For a moment he stood, near the middle of the room, as if undecided what to do. Then, as if giving up the idea of attack, he laughed loudly, and said in a tone of affected carelessness:

"Oh, I forgot another very pretty part of our plan—the story old Dave and I are going to tell after you're dead. When the Danish police discover you with your head caved in he'll sob: 'My poor nephew! We were running out here in my car when a tire broke and he was smashed against a tree. Hustled him in here, but he was stone-dead. Poor young chap! Ain't that nifty?"

"So my uncle is coming out here?"

"Yes. After he's given me time to

finish the job. He's taking no risks this time. Wants to see the body."

Suddenly Hetheridge, without a shadow of warning, hurled his big bulk at Roland in one murderous lunge, the blackjack raised over his head. Jumping back as far as he could, the youth whirled the chair about and caught the other's descending arm. It broke the blow, but failed to make Hetheridge drop the weapon. Snarling with pain, he fell back to the door of the room.

"Now!" he shouted.

Putting one hand up to the wall behind him, he pressed a button. Every detail of the room vanished in pitch-darkness.

Roland, leaping to one side, felt the plunging form of his antagonist brush his sleeve. He heard the smashing impact of the blackjack against the wall. With desperate swiftness he again whirled the chair round and brought it down where he had felt the attack flash past.

But Hetheridge, though bulky, was quick. The chair, in its turn, crashed against the wall, splintering two of its legs. Simultaneously Roland felt the whirring of the blackjack close to his temple.

He staggered back. Again he brought the chair down. It was shattered to pieces against the floor. Only one of its legs remained in his clutch. Then a blow from his invisible antagonist sent the leg whirling through black space.

"Now!" came with murderous hoarseness out of the dark.

Unarmed now, Roland crawled stealthily to the wall of the room, and, feeling his way along it, drew noiselessly toward the door. He could hear Hetheridge's heavy step searching for him somewhere at the other end. Tiptoeing, hugging the wall, the young man soon found the door.

With desperate haste and thoroughness his fingers explored every inch of the wall near it until they found the electric-light button which he had seen Hetheridge press a moment before. He pressed it. Blinding light filled the room.

Hetheridge was about half-way across to the other wall, his back turned. The light took him by surprise. Before he could either attack or defend himself adequately, Roland ducked in under his guard, and, as he raised the blackjack, caught him squarely on the tip of the jaw with a staggering blow of the fist.

Hetheridge went down flat on his back.

Roland dropped down across him. He dug with his knees into the other's stomach. With one hand he pinioned to the floor the hand holding the blackjack, and struggled to wrest it from the prostrate man's grasp; with the fingers of his other hand he pressed against Hetheridge's throat until the scoundrel's eyes bulged and his cheeks whitened.

But Roland was no match for Hetheridge in strength. Slowly the arm holding the blackjack crooked upward, forcing back the young man. Slowly the big muscles heaved the body upward, ever upward. Roland, fighting to the last ounce and notch of his strength, knew he was losing out.

He could feel his muscles straining as if they would snap. The perspiration dripped from him. His throat went dry. Over Hetheridge's face a cruel smile began to spread.

"Open that door!"

It was a voice from outside. Involuntarily the straining muscles of both men relaxed while they listened.

"Open that door! Open that—"

There came a thundering crash, and another and another. Then the door flew straight from its hinges and a man hurtled into the room like a projectile, and went down to the floor in a sprawling heap. Up again like lightning, he grasped Roland by the back of his collar and hurled him into a corner against the wall.

Then he whipped out a revolver and pointed it at Hetheridge.

"Hands up!"

Hetheridge had almost scrambled to his feet. At the word his hands flew up like pistons.

"Drop that thing!"

The blackjack, slipping from inert fingers, struck the floor.

Still keeping Hetheridge covered, the newcomer turned to Roland, sitting limply in the corner where he had been deposited so unceremoniously.

"How do you do, my boy?" said the newcomer with a broad smile.

It was Professor Copernicus.

CHAPTER XIV.

RETRIBUTION AT LAST.

COPERNICUS was vastly pleased with himself.

Round and round the subjugated Hetheridge he walked, uttering strange and truculent noises. Ever and anon he would turn, courting approval, to Roland, who had picked himself up from his corner and was engaged in dusting off his clothes.

"It takes me back—" murmured the hero of the evening dreamily, never ceasing for an instant to keep Hetheridge covered with his revolver. "It takes me back to the days when I hunted Malaysian pirates as skipper of the—ah, those days! Let me see now—the next move, as I remember it, in these cases is to search the ruffian. How it all comes back—how it all comes back!"

So he searched his captive with immense gusto, never letting him take his hands down, and prodding him occasionally in the ribs with the revolver.

Hetheridge had no weapons concealed on his person.

Then the professor and young Grelthorpe tore the curtains from one of the windows and bound Hetheridge hand and foot. Then they gagged him with Roland's handkerchief. And over and over again Roland's rescuer kept murmuring in a far-away voice:

"It takes me back! How it takes me back!"

"Professor, you have saved my life!" exclaimed Roland after their captive, securely bound, was laid, glowering, on the floor of the room. "Won't you let me know now to whom I owe my life, so that I may thank you properly?"

His deliverer looked at him with much reproach in his eyes.

"Roland, you impinge!" he muttered.

"Well, then, if you won't do that, tell me how under the sun you got out here so providentially. But first I'll turn out the light. Uncle is expected, you know, and we mustn't scare him away."

He pressed the button on the wall by the door. The lights went out. The two squatted in the darkness, close to their gagged and bound prisoner. Copernicus began:

"Easy. Elementary. Returning to our Copenhagen hotel from a most varied and instructive evening—I had discussed Confucianism with a park loafer and dined with a Danish major who wanted to fight a duel with me before we reached the coffee—I happened to note on the table of our parlor the note which you received yesterday, signed 'John Lithgow.' Are you listening, captive of mine?"

He poked Hetheridge. As well as the crowded condition of his mouth would allow, Hetheridge cursed him.

"'Tis well, captive. I didn't want you to lose a fine story. To resume:

"Something about that note looked strangely familiar to me.

"'Where have I seen that handwriting before?' I asked myself, placing a finger to my brow. And then it all came over me in a flash.

"I whipped out of my pocket the note which David Grelthorpe gave me at his dinner-table in New York, certifying that I had been present at a really élite function — remember? — I showed it to you, Roland.

"I was right. The handwriting

was exactly the same as that in the note signed 'John Lithgow' and sent to you in Copenhagen, making the appointment for this evening.

"Instantly I scented something heinous. I knew that David Grelthorpe had hatched out some awful plot for his nephew's undoing.

"Did I sob? Did I hesitate? Did I shirk? I did not.

"I hired the fastest taxicab in Denmark. I raced to the Bristol. There a flunky told me that you had just left.

"'In that car,' he added, pointing to a receding speck in the distance.

"I leaped back into the fastest taxi in Denmark and spoke a few well-chosen words to its pilot. His vehicle thereupon became the fastest in Europe.

"'Freeze to yon!' I roared, pointing to the speck ahead. It wasn't Danish, but—he froze!

"Over and over again we almost lost you, but each time we simply transformed ourselves from the fastest taxicab in Europe into the fastest in the world and—there you were again!

"When we were a few hundred yards behind you we saw you stop before this house. I told my man to draw up by the side of the road behind some bushes, and I ran the rest of the way to this villa.

"I crawled up on the veranda and listened at one of the windows. As long as the lights were on and there were voices coming from inside I did nothing—for all I knew I might be on a wild-goose chase. But when the lights went out and unmistakable sounds of fighting percolated to me it was quite another matter.

"I pounded on the window. Nobody paid any attention. I yelled. Nobody cared. I saw that something tremendous and unparalleled must be done. Hence my unceremonious entrance.

"Congratulate me, youth! Gnash teeth, villain!"

Roland silently pressed the hand of his deliverer. Hetheridge rolled his eyes balefully.

"How," inquired the young man, "did you happen to have a revolver?"

"Always have it in my baggage. A gift to me from Admiral— Roland, you impinge!"

As he spoke they distinctly heard the chugging of a motor, stopping apparently before the house.

"S-h!"

Roland and Copernicus crept close to the door and crouched one on each side of it.

A step sounded on the veranda. A key turned in the lock.

The door opened. Somebody, invisible almost in the darkness, stepped inside.

"Hetheridge!" came in a hoarse whisper.

"Hetheridge"—again—louder this time. The speaker seemed tense with excitement.

"Hetheridge—are you there?"

Then, suddenly, the room became light as day.

At the same instant Roland and Professor Copernicus, leaping from opposite sides, caught hold of a man standing just inside the door and bore him to the ground between them.

He went down with a yell of terror.

Copernicus promptly sat on his stomach. Keeping his hand on the man's throat, Roland looked into his terrified eyes and said with a quiet smile:

"Good evening, Uncle David!"

Half an hour later.

David Grelthorpe and Hetheridge emerged from the villa into the balmy air of the night. Close behind them walked Roland and Copernicus.

David Grelthorpe's head was bowed, his face haggard. In the short interval that had elapsed since his arrival at the villa he seemed to have become a much older man.

On the veranda he turned to Roland with an impulsive movement. All his arrogance, all his masterliness, had

oozed from him. He had become not only old, but broken.

"For Claire's sake, Roland," he begged in a husky voice, "don't give me up to the police. For her sake!"

"I must."

The face of the young man who had just escaped death a second time at the hands of the uncle who had robbed him of his millions was like flint.

"Not even for Claire's sake can I spare a scoundrel like you. I ought to have denounced you in New York. Instead I thought I would play with you for a while—torture you."

"You did, my boy."

"I was wrong. It almost cost me my life. Now, walk on ahead."

To emphasize the order Copernicus prodded Grelthorpe in the back with his revolver, which he still held in his hand. Haggard and bent David Grelthorpe shuffled along toward the road in front of the villa.

Two automobiles stood in that road—the one in which Hetheridge had brought Roland, and another in which old Grelthorpe had driven out alone through the night—in order, as he thought, to see the dead body of his nephew after the murderous Hetheridge had accomplished the job for which he had been hired.

The taxicab which had made it possible for Professor Copernicus to arrive so providentially on the scene was still standing where Copernicus had left it a short distance down the road, shielded by the bushes which fringed both sides.

Hetheridge, prodded by the revolver, climbed into the nearest car—the one which he had driven.

"Professor, you go with Hetheridge," commanded Roland Grelthorpe. "I can manage Uncle David in the other car."

Hardly had he spoken the words before he was swept to one side. David Grelthorpe, with the bound of a tiger, landed in the seat of the nearest car beside Hetheridge.

"Drive like the devil!" he shouted to his henchman. Before Roland could recover, before Copernicus could even grasp what was occurring, the car, leaping forward under the full power that Hetheridge shot into it, rushed away at top speed.

Then came a flash of fire from the revolver and a report. But Roland struck up Copernicus's hand before he could send another bullet after the fugitives.

"Don't stop to shoot! Into the car! Into the car!"

Into the other car they scrambled, both of them. There was a mad, whirring sound as it, too, felt the jar of its full motive power, and then off it went like a huge projectile into the blackness of the night.

Over the peaceful road it raced at a speed that was sheer madness—past silent little houses, grazing hedge and fence and lamp-post, rocking round curves, spinning on two wheels. Roland, guiding it, bent forward, strained his eyes into the pitch blackness ahead, where the other car was rocketing onward at a speed as mad as his own.

The man by Roland's side, clutching the seat with one hand, gripped his revolver in the other, and also peered into the darkness, hungering for a chance to fire another shot.

"There!" he yelled and pointed wildly. The car ahead, swinging round a curve under a roadside light, came into plain view.

A flash. A loud report.

"Damn!" roared Copernicus. "Off they go again—don't think I touched 'em. Great guns! What was that?"

A report like a shot had come out of the darkness ahead, followed by an ear-splitting crash.

Roland jammed on his brakes. The car slid forward for some distance, coming finally to a stop close to a formless, twisted heap, lying on a ditch beside the road. It was what remained of the other car.

"Burst a tire," said Roland in a hushed voice. "Turned turtle."

Copernicus nodded without vouchsafing a word. With white faces, both men tumbled from their seats and hurried over to the ruined automobile.

Pinned under it lay Hetheridge. One look showed that he was dead. About ten yards away lay David Grelthorpe. Evidently he had been hurled from the car when the accident occurred squarely against a stone wall. He, too, was dead—all crumpled in a heap at the foot of the wall.

Roland looked down at his uncle's face. Involuntarily he snatched off the cap he was wearing. From beside him he heard the hushed voice of his companion murmur:

"Vengeance is mine; I will repay!"

A month later.

Claire Grelthorpe, in deep mourning, sat at a table in a Copenhagen restaurant. It was set for three. Roland, across the table from her, was fidgeting impatiently. Several times he glanced at his watch.

"Hang it all, I don't think our eccentric guest is coming!" he exclaimed. "What do you say to beginning our dinner, Mrs. Roland Grelthorpe?"

Whereupon a *maître d'hotel,* leaning over the young American's chair, handed him a note.

Roland read it in silence. He uttered an exclamation of annoyance.

"What is it, dear?" inquired Claire.

"The confounded cuss!" ejaculated her husband. And he read aloud:

"Companion of my wanderings—multimillionaire—benedict!

"My wedding present to you is—not to mar your wedding feast to which you so kindly invited me! I go. To do otherwise were to impinge.

"I am off to China to study that fascinating subject, Confucianism—mayhap, also, I may strike up an acquaintance with the Nestorian Stone.

"May all happiness attend you! By the way, you might send me a sheaf of bank-notes. Address, General Delivery, London.

"Farewell!

"COPERNICUS.'

"P. S.—And to think that you don't yet know who I really am!"

THE END.

SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY.

SHE walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
Thus mellow'd to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impair'd the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
Or softly lightens o'er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent.

Lord Byron.

The Purple Seaweed*

By Max Rittenberg

I.

THE shabby stranger had waited the whole morning and part of the afternoon in the ante-room of Loder, Avison & Co., bullion brokers, Lombard Street.

His request was to see Mr. Morrice Avison, and he had been told at various times that the managing partner was "not yet arrived," "too busy to see him," "gone out to lunch." Finally he penciled on a scrap of paper: "I have a fortune to give you," and handed it to the office-boy for delivery to Mr. Avison when he should return from the mid-day meal.

The office-boy grinned discreetly as he laid that open message before his chief.

Morrice Avison was a well-fed man of thirty-six, at the moment somewhat somnolent from the effect of a carefully selected meal accompanied by a half-bottle of excellent *Graves*. His career had been a placid one, for he had stepped early into a family partnership in an old-established business which yielded a fair income without any special exertion or initiative.

He was still a bachelor, because it was for him an easy and comfortable mode of existence, and he viewed marriage as a problematic personal gain. His clothes were sober but excellently tailored; his plump hands were carefully tended. He regarded himself essentially as a man of shrewd caution.

Mellowed by the lunch and the wine, Avison felt that he had kept the shabby visitor waiting sufficiently long to cover the demands of Lombard Street dignity.

"Very well, show him in," he conceded. "What was the name?"

"Mr. Nicholas, sir. No card."

"Come back in ten minutes' time with the usual 'important message.'"

The office-boy ushered the visitor into the soft-carpeted, polished-mahogany furnished room. This Mr. Nicholas was an undersized man of indeterminate age, peculiarly colorless and undistinguished. He conveyed no special impression of ability, personality, or good looks—one could forget him a few minutes after meeting him. Avison, who considered himself a shrewd judge of character, felt puzzled to arrive at any conclusion, and left the mental summary blank.

"Well, so you have a fortune to give me?" he greeted with a tolerant smile meant to convey an impression of his own good-naturedness in granting the interview.

The visitor silently unwrapped a

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small brown-paper parcel and displayed on the desk a sealed jar containing what looked to be a fragment of purple seaweed preserved in spirit.

"This seaweed contains gold," he said.

"Explain."

When the office-boy entered at the appointed ten minutes later Avison waved him away impatiently. He was listening with intentness to the remarkable story unfolded by the shabby stranger. At the end of a half-hour, he considered thoughtfully, passing in review his well-tended nails, and then shot a quick glance upward.

"Will you leave this seaweed with me for the purpose of analysis?" he asked sharply.

Mr. Nicholas met his gaze without the least suspicion of flinching.

"Certainly. Why not?" he answered with a simplicity so deep that Avison could not fathom it; and presently left the office.

A most startling proposal had been placed before the bullion broker—startling beyond anything that had ever happened to him in his sheltered career. Soaked with caution though he was, rigidly suspicious of "city schemes," yet he was inclined to believe in the extraordinary story unfolded to him by the shabby stranger.

As a first move to verify its *bona fides,* Avison called on Professor Challis, lecturer in botany at the South Kensington Royal College of Science, and asked for an identification of the purple seaweed.

The professor examined it with the zest of a scientist in the presence of the unknown, and made a running commentary of his observations, as though demonstrating before a class of students:

"Purple is scarcely a scientific description of the color. It would be more accurate to describe it as a purplish-bluish-olive, though possibly it has become faded from its original tint through the chemical action of the spirit. I should assign it to the family *Cyanophyllaceae,* but the genus and species are wholly novel to me.

"The formation of the 'bladders'—that is to say, those air-filled protuberances by which a seaweed is enabled to float or trail on the surface of water—is markedly peculiar. Usually the bladders are rounded, but these are cupped in a manner similar to that of an acorn-cup. The fiber of the plant seems to be immensely strong"—he was stretching the specimen between his hands—"almost wiry, in fact. Most interesting!"

"Can you say what part of the world it comes from?" asked Avison.

"I cannot venture an opinion on that point, other than to say that it is probably of a tropical—or, at all events, a sub-tropical—habitat."

"Would it grow on rocks?"

"Since the specimen does not embrace a root, it is impossible to answer you definitely. Have you no further specimen to submit to me?"

"Not at present."

"Would you be kind enough to let me have this for museum purposes?"

"I'm afraid I can't spare it just now," evaded Avison.

The professor threw in what to his mind was a very special inducement: "I should propose to name it after yourself, making the species designation *Avisonii. Quercohydrostatus Avisonii!*"

"I must see. Later on, perhaps," returned the bullion broker vaguely, and in spite of Professor Challis's persistence, he left eventually with his precious speciment intact.

His next move was to the laboratories of J. Herbert Threlward, F. C. S., analyst and assayer, with whom he was accustomed to have business dealings in the assaying of bullion. The request was that Mr. Threlward should analyze a half-portion of the seaweed for the element gold, and if the latter were found present, calculate the quantity per ton of material. Avison asked him to keep the matter strictly confidential, and in fact to

make the analysis in person instead of handing it over to an assistant.

The analyst's written report was as follows: "I burned the weed piece by piece in a covered crucible, then extracted with mercury and distilled off the latter in the usual course of procedure. Gold was heavily present, to the extent of thirty-eight ounces to the ton of material. I do not give a closer figure, because the weed had been preserved in spirit, and in its natural element the gross weight would be somewhat different.

"In ordinary gold-mining one-third of an ounce to the ton of material would be a very fair yield. I refer, of course, to mining proper, not to placer workings. I wish to add that I express no opinion as to whether the gold is naturally present in the weed or placed there artificially."

Avison had already considered that latter possibility. The shabby stranger claimed that his purple seaweed had the property of attracting to itself the gold in sea-water, just as other varieties of seaweed absorb iodin and form an important commercial source of iodids. Not only did Mr. Nicholas know of immense tracts of the purple weed, but it would also be possible to transplant it elsewhere and form nurseries, each busy in extracting gold from the limitless quantities in the oceans.

Such was the claim. The other possibility was voiced by Loder, senior partner in the firm, to whom Avison confided the result of the botanist's and assayer's reports.

"That specimen might have been soaked in a solution of gold," he objected.

Loder, an elderly man, took an only occasional share in the working of the firm's business. His conservative caution had filtered through the younger man, but Avison had in addition an unconquerable belief in his own shrewdness.

"It might have been," answered Avison, "but it is too obvious a trick to try on with me. In any case, I shouldn't dream of taking the man's word for it."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Investigate."

"How?"

"Charter a yacht and go with him to the spot where he says the purple seaweed grows."

"Where is that?"

"He won't disclose it yet."

"A wild-goose chase!"

Avison studied his carefully tended nails. "I'm inclined to believe in him," he answered with a judicial calmness.

"A trick to get money out of you!"

"He won't get a penny until I bring home a hundred tons of the seaweed and have the gold—if any—extracted from it."

Argument did not convince the senior partner. He objected to Avison taking a holiday in May which might extend for months, while a single month in August usually sufficed. He considered that a partner was morally bound to stand by the interests of the firm and not dissipate his energies in other directions. The business earned a steady income—not large, but safe, given ordinary care and attention. Such an income ought to suffice for any man of reasonable aims.

These objections made no mark on Avison. He had implicit faith in his own judgment. He had determined to test out the stranger's story. Even a mere hundred tons of the seaweed would yield gold to the value of eight thousand pounds, and there were—so the stranger alleged—thousands of tons of it in sight. Money was waiting to be *picked* like blackberries.

Nor was Avison afraid of any danger suggested by the senior partner, because he had thought out an abundance of precautionary measures.

"The yacht will be mine," he said, "and the skipper and crew of my own choosing. Just a few men, carefully selected. Steady men—not too intelligent. No firearms on board except

my own revolver. I'll have engines as well as sailing-power, and an ample supply of coal. Provisions for a long period, and a doctor to look after the health side."

Loder was forced unwillingly to acquiesce.

The choosing of the right vessel occupied Avison for the better part of the month of May. A pleasure yacht would not give him sufficient storage accommodation for the storage of the purple seaweed. A schooner would only have sailing power. A tramp steamer would be very expensive to charter.

He compromised finally on a North Sea steam trawler—a stanch, workmanlike vessel, able to ride out any gale, and built with ample storage-room for its usual harvest of herrings. In its drab commercialism it was unbeautiful to look upon—no one with a sense of fitness could speak of it in the feminine gender—but it could carry Avison in safety round the world if need be.

He gave out that his purpose was to dredge for tropical marine organisms, and with this ostensible object he left England in June for Bermuda, taking with him officers and a crew of twelve, a doctor suffering from overwork, who was ready to enjoy a cruising holiday for a nominal salary, and Nicholas.

The vessel, designated originally as GY, 49, now bore the name of Atlantis. Avison was secretly proud of this poetic touch of his.

At Bermuda the Atlantis reported all well. It recoaled to full bunkers, and sailed on southward in the direction of the West Indies. A day out, Avison had the course turned at Nicholas's prompting to southeast.

They were bound for the Sargasso Sea, tracking through an ocean empty of craft.

Another of Avison's shrewd precautions here came into play. He kept the ship's chronometer in his own cabin, with the intention of altering it slightly from time to time, so that the captain and crew would be deceived as to longitude, while Avison himself would note the amount of error. In this fashion the exact location of the purple seaweed would be known only to him and to Nicholas.

II.

For day following day an unclouded sun, master of the heavens, blazed down on a sea of sapphire, ruffled only by the northeast trade. The set sails needed no watching; the engines of the vessel pounded on in a rhythm as even as the march of the tides.

The featureless days merged into one another as one stretch of ocean merges into the next—without boundary, without landmark. The trade wind, little by little, died away; the useless sails were furled; flying fish, pursuing and pursued, flashed iridescent wings; the waters became speckled with fragments of orange-weed.

"We're nearing the Sargasso," mentioned Captain Gilray, pointing to a floating mass of kelp. "Will you begin your dredging here, sir?"

"Not yet," answered Avison. "Farther southward."

To all on board, with one exception, the succession of blazing tropic days had brought a feeling of languor and of luxurious *laissez aller*. Time mattered nothing. It was sufficient to live and laze.

The one exception was Avison. From the cold, prudently cautious man of business he was burgeoning into an adventurer of the seas. Like Drake in the Golden Hind, he felt himself sailing on into the unknown in search of fabulous treasure. While others lounged and dozed, his eyes roved the horizon for some sign of the land of fortune, from which he would return with full holds and sunken Plimsoll-mark.

Nicholas remained an enigma. That shabby, inconsequential little man seemed to have roamed in the course of his career over the whole

earth. He was not a mere sailor-tramp, but a man of education—of refinement even. He could talk interestingly on any topic that Avison broached, with a far-reaching knowledge deepening the mystery of his origin.

He was not eager to talk or to parade his knowledge—indeed, he rarely spoke unless first addressed. Why should a man of brains and education have taken to such a life of penniless wandering? He did not drink beyond the conventions of sociability, nor was there any outward sign of drugs or dissipation which might account for his poverty. Avison, puzzled by the enigma, neither liked nor disliked him. He was too inconsequential.

As the Atlantis plodded further southward the orange-weed began to thicken into masses and islands awash, until in the distance the combination of orange and deep-blue sea between tricked the eye into a vision of dark-green marshes.

"Hadn't we better stop now, sir?" suggested the captain. "This weed is liable to foul the propeller."

Avison, at Nicholas's prompting, now set a course due east.

"I don't much fancy it," returned the captain bluntly. "I've always heard of the Sargasso as a perfect maze. Once get right inside, and the Lord alone could tell you the way out."

"We shall not go right in," returned Avison with cheerful confidence. "And the vessel is powerful enough to cut through anything in the way of seaweed."

"We must stop at sundown," decided the captain.

The doctor, lazing in the shade of an awning, thoroughly enjoying his change from the grind of an East End practise, laughed lightly.

"I shouldn't mind getting stuck," said he. "I could do with a couple of months of this."

Very early the following morning Nicholas rapped at the door of Avison's cabin. "If you will come on deck you will see that we are nearly at the tract I spoke of."

Eagerly the bullion broker jumped up from his berth and followed his guide into the dawn-flush of the windless ocean. Nicholas pointed to the horizon eastward. "You see that the color of the weed is changing."

"Isn't that a dawn effect?"

"No, wait and you will see that I am right."

Avison, adventurer, waited on deck with eager eyes and nostrils until the mounting sun had toned the landscape to its normal colors. Eastward that vision of green marsh was now darker than yesterday, and in the windless air was a faint tang of odor more subtly acrid than before.

As the Atlantis advanced to the eastward during the morning the floating wrack became denser; the vessel had to pick its path this way and that to avoid the thickets. By noon the changed condition eastward was plain beyond question — the marshes were now a deep purplish-blue.

By nightfall, when the Atlantis stopped to rest, they had touched the fringe of the purple forest, of which the tree-tops, as it were, trailed above the motionless waters.

Avison did not sleep. About midnight, when all on board were deep in slumber, he rose from his berth, made his way quietly on deck, and, unseen, lowered himself over the side of the vessel by means of a rope-ladder. A knife was with him, and by patient hacking he secured a fragment of the purple weed and took it to his cabin. There he burned it in a crucible over the silent flame of a spirit-lamp until gray ashes alone remained. He had learned from Threlward how to test this for the presence of gold.

An hour later confirmation lay before his eyes. Gold was in the gray ash. Gold illimitable was in his

reach in the purple forest round. One had only to pluck it!

III.

"HAVE the hatches opened, captain, and fill the holds with this purple weed."

"I thought you had come to dredge for marine animals," answered Captain Gilray in surprise.

Avison, barely able to control his eager eyes and tongue to the prudence which was necessary, explained that the weed contained iodin in sufficient quantity to repay gathering. One might perhaps get a thousand pounds' worth into the holds.

That was the story he had decided upon long before they reached the Sargasso Sea. He ached to be able to shout aloud that it was gold they were to gather—gold! essence of life and power!—but it would not do to trust this secret to his helpers. He had heard of treasure-hunts setting out under the fairest auspices, with all on board pleasant and companionable — until the treasure had been found and the lust of money had turned men into devils.

The voyage of the Atlantis must not end like this. He would veil the treasure as "iodin," which held no glamour of riches.

Under the orders of the skipper the ballasted holds were opened, the ballast cast overboard, and the work of grappling for the seaweed began.

It proved a task of unexpected difficulty. The fiber of the weed in the thicker stems had the strength of wire rope. A straining donkey-engine, hauling at a grappled mass, spluttered and choked to impotence as the enormous weight of a century-old plant came half over the listed side of the vessel.

The crew were furnished with axes and saws, and under the burning tropic sun sweated at the task of hacking the masses of weed to fragments that could be hauled aboard. Avison himself worked with them, impervious to fatigue until his fatted muscles knotted with cramp and he had, perforce, to lie in a deck-chair and chafe at the slowness of the crew.

Yet what need was there for haste? Time mattered nothing. There were no storms to face in this windless, tideless sea. Provisions and water would last for many months. Why fret at delay?

Avison could give no logical answer to himself. He felt like a man in a dream with treasure lying scattered all round him, when instinct urges to make haste and gather before the treasure vanishes.

Day after day the work continued. As they hauled in the weed the vessel moved slowly onward into richer and richer tracts. All round them now was a purple marsh. Only in the far distance was the greenish vision that told of the ordinary orange-weed of the Sargasso Sea.

The holds began to fill with a slimy tangle of treasure, twisted like writhing serpents, repulsive to look upon except to Avison, who nightly feasted his eyes on the piling masses. The acrid odor of the weed began to take on a new and menacing character.

Dr. Melville, rousing himself from his luxurious lethargy, uttered a word of warning: "This stuff seems to be decomposing. Under a sun like this it might breed goodness knows what. Better clear out now, Mr. Avison, and take it to port."

"The holds are not half full yet."

"You could return for more later."

Captain Gilray emphasized the warning with a furrowed brow; and reluctantly Avison consulted with his guide.

"You could burn the weed to ashes," whispered Nicholas, "and so carry home twenty times the quantity of gold."

The eyes of the bullion-broker lighted eagerly at this suggestion, and he gave orders to the captain to have the massed treasure burned to ashes in the vessel's stoke-hold.

"We shall need our coal to get out of this place and back to port," objected the captain.

Avison brushed aside that counsel of prudence. "Keep enough coal for the purpose," he ordered decisively, "and use the rest in the way I direct."

The routine of work on board was now changed. All hands, seamen and stokers alike, were set to the transference of the slimy, snaky masses of weed from hold to furnaces. It proved very difficult to burn in quantity, and soon there were mutterings among the crew at this unnatural addition to their duties.

"Promise them double pay at the end of the voyage," was Nicholas's suggestion; and Avison called them together on deck and made the announcement. They received it coldly.

"Well, what's the matter? Speak out!" demanded Avison impatiently.

A grizzled boatswain shuffled his feet and took the word.

"What is the use of burning all this 'ere stuff, sir?"

"The ashes contain iodin in quantity. That's a fairly valuable drug."

"Well, sir, the smell of it seems to make us feel queerlike."

"Afraid of a smell?" scorned Avison.

"And it don't look natural to me. I never seen such stuff before. Like octopuses and things it looks."

"Rubbish!" Avison picked up a fragment of a recently gathered leaf lying on the deck and chewed into it. "It's perfectly harmless seaweed. Not poisonous in the slightest! The doctor will tell you that."

He looked compellingly at Melville, and the doctor nodded a vague assent.

The men went back to work, and little by little the gathered weed was converted into ashes mingled with the coal-ash of the furnaces. These were carefully packed and preserved.

"Now we'd better get back to port," said Captain Gilray.

"With all this valuable weed untouched?" Avison swept his hand around the vista of illimitable treasure encircling the vessel. "That would be ridiculous! No, I want another load converted to ash first."

"We've got to hoard our coal," objected the captain resentfully.

"Once in the trades we can proceed under sail."

"We must keep enough for emergencies."

"Who's owner here?" demanded Avison unanswerably.

Again the crew proceeded to grapple with and hack and haul on board the masses of tangled weed, while the furnaces were kept at work day and night to convert them into the precious ash.

One load, hauled upward by the straining donkey-engine, brought with it from the depths the skeleton of a human being, through which the fiber had interlaced so minutely that the the several bones were held together like an anatomical specimen.

It was as though the plant had eaten through and through the flesh, and in the burrowing had woven the skeleton compact. The men let the mass of weed fall backward into the sea, and with one accord ceased work.

"What's the trouble now?" demanded Avison, hastening on deck from a half-finished meal.

The mate on duty shrugged his shoulders, and the grizzled boatswain made himself spokesman of the feelings of the crew.

"We don't like the looks of it, sir," he muttered. "There's something devilish about this 'ere weed."

"Offer them treble pay," whispered Nicholas, ever at Avison's elbow.

"I'll give treble pay at the end of the voyage to every man who has carried out orders faithfully."

"We'd sooner get back home, sir. This 'ere Sargasso is"—he hesitated for a moment, then continued boldly—"is haunted. Last night—"

Avison looked icy disbelief of any statement that was to come; but a sailor took up the word vehemently:

"Last night, plain as you stand there, I saw a little man walking over the water! He walked round"—he waved his hand descriptively—"and round the ship, and after that he sort of flew up on board."

"Perhaps it was Mr. Nicholas taking an evening stroll," suggested Avison derisively. Then his voice hardened into menace. "Any man disobeys orders will be put into irons! Who first?"

Sullenly they returned to their respective tasks.

Came the day when the captain and mate and the two engineers declared emphatically that not another hundredweight of coal could be spared. Avison found argument useless, and his orders to them could not carry menace as with the crew. As a compromise he directed that the two holds should be filled with the weed, and when this was completed they should make tracks for port.

It was noticeable now that the side-pocket of his flannel coat bulged. He kept his revolver ready to enforce what he considered any reasonable wishes. His blood was on fire with the lust of gold. All prudence, all caution, had deserted him. He saw only that gold illimitable surrounded him—his for the plucking!

Captain and officers and crew did their work in resentful silence. As far as possible they avoided speaking to Avison or to Nicholas!

The bullion-broker had Nicholas move to his own cabin, and at night he locked the door.

IV.

THE bulging holds, acrid-odored, were battened down at the end of a strenuous week's work. To-morrow the Atlantis, hull deep in the water, would pick its way out of this sea of weed, westward and homeward. Night drew the curtain with tropic suddenness. The crew, joyful at the coming release, gathered on the forecastle for a sing-song with a fiddle and a concertina, while the officers watched them from deck-chairs amidships.

Avison, alone at the stern of the vessel, looked over the westward lane of open water which had been cleared of weed as the Atlantis moved slowly onward. As the moon rose his eye could follow this winding lane into the distance.

Then his gaze turned to the masses of untouched purple weed northward and southward. His pulses hammered at the thought of the gold that must be left behind. If only he could burn to ashes what was now in the holds and fill again and again! But that was impossible. Even if he could coerce captain and crew with the revolver on which his fingers rested, even if he could overpower them, he could not move and burn the weed single-handed.

Suppose he were to reveal to them that it contained gold, and offer them a share of the treasure landed in port? The idea flamed up and flickered down. He loathed to part with what was his by right of conquest. He wanted it all for himself, with the single exception of the share he had promised to Nicholas. Hours passed in this brooding.

The waters, usually oil-smooth and stagnant, seemed to be rippling as though a shudder were passing through them. The masses of weed shivered and sighed. By now the crew and officers had retired to rest.

Avison, rousing himself reluctantly from his reverie, went below. Nicholas, already in the cabin, slept in a peculiar silence of his own.

The bullion-broker locked the cabin door, placed the revolver under his pillow, and passed into a feverish sleep. About two o'clock a slight noise wakened him to consciousness.

He gripped his revolver and pulled at a cord which switched aside a curtain over the port-hole. The moonlight showed Nicholas entering the cabin.

"Where have you been?" demanded Avison.

"On deck. 'A' wind has risen."

"A storm coming?"

"No; not a storm, I think," was the placid answer.

"I'll see for myself."

He made quickly for the deck. A wind moaned thinly in the rigging, and wavelets slapped against the iron plates of the vessel. The masses of purple seaweed seemed to be drifting with the wind, their trailing tentacles snaking this way and that. To the westward the open lane was fast becoming blocked with the floating wrack.

A great fear gripped at Avison's heart. He roused the captain, pulled him on deck to show him the changed condition.

"Lucky I kept that coal," said Captain Gilray grimly, and he sounded the alarm-bell.

Furnaces were stoked, search-lights rigged, and in the foredawn the Atlantis set to the task of bunting its way westward.

The rising sun seemed to suck the wind upward, and a calm succeeded to that transient breeze; but the whole geography of the region had changed overnight. The purple weed had crowded in upon them in dense masses; its snaky tentacles entwined in the propeller; again and again men had to be sent down to hack it free. By evening they had not advanced ten miles, and nightfall made it imperative to stop.

On the following day conditions were worse. From somewhere in the distance a storm was sending to them its ground-swell through the dead waters, and the purple weed massed upon them thicker and thicker. Men began to complain that as they worked to free the propeller tentacles of the weed sucked at them like the arms of giant octopi.

"I always said there was something devilish about this 'ere weed," muttered the grizzled boatswain in Avison's hearing.

That night the captain held a private consultation in his cabin, of which only the result was communicated to 'Avison. "The weed is loading us too deep. We must clear some of it overboard."

"I forbid that!" declared Avison heatedly.

"Why?"

Failing to convince them by argument, Avison had to play his trump card.

"The weed contains gold," he told them with emphasis. "It's worth, at the very least, eighty pounds a ton."

Cold disbelief showed on the faces of captain and officers alike.

"I tell you it *is* so! Ask Nicholas if you don't believe me!"

A seaman was sent to find him. He was absent a long time. Avison, fever-eyed, drummed nervously on the cabin table.

At length the answer came that Mr. Nicholas was nowhere to be found. They searched the vessel from end to end, above and below. No trace of him.

"Has he fallen overboard?" demanded Avison, trembling at the thought that his guide might no longer be at his elbow.

The forecastle had their own explanation, whispered among themselves: "He's walking the waters again!"

"Open the hatches and dump the weed overboard!" was the captain's order.

In the moonlight derricks were rigged, and the coughing donkey-engine sweated at its task of hauling up the slimy, evil-smelling masses and flinging them over the side.

Avison, wild-eyed, watched with a pain at his heart that increased with every ton of treasure cast away. Eighty pounds gone; a hundred and sixty pounds gone — a thousand pounds — two thousand — five thousand—

"Stop!" he ordered imperatively.

They took no notice of his command.

At dawn he declared frantically that

not another ton of treasure would he sacrifice; and drawing his revolver, he leveled it at Captain Gilray.

"Drop that!" returned the captain roughly. "Our only chance of getting out is to clear the vessel of this rubbish and ride high in the water."

"I tell you it's gold you're flinging overboard! *Gold!*"

Dr. Melville saw the necessity for action. He approached Avison guardedly.

"If you will go to your cabin and rest a little—"

Avison wheeled round and jerked the trigger of his revolver. The bullet whizzed past the doctor's ribs. Captain Gilray and the mate flung themselves on Avison and succeeded in overpowering him.

The work of clearing the vessel went ruthlessly on. All the weed in the holds they cleared, and the packed ashes as well; while so strongly did the crew feel on the matter that they set themselves to gather up every tiny fragment of the accursed weed and cast it overboard.

Then slowly and painfully, by a few yards at a time, the Atlantis tore its way out from the marshes of the purple seaweed, reluctant to lose its prey.

They cleared the Sargasso with bunks emptied of even a last basketful of coal and, towed by the labor of men straining at boat-oars, crawled into the region of the trade wind.

Avison had to be placed in irons, with a doctor in constant attendance, for the lust of gold had turned his brain to homicidal mania.

"MY DAYS AMONG THE DEAD ARE PAST."

My days among the dead are past;
  Around me I behold,
Where'er these casual eyes are cast,
  The mighty minds of old;
My never-failing friends are they,
With whom I converse day by day.

With them I take delight in weal,
  And seek relief in wo;
And, while I understand and feel
  How much to them I owe,
My cheeks have often been bedew'd
With tears of thoughtful gratitude.

My thoughts are with the dead; with them
  I live in long past years,
Their virtues love, their faults condemn,
  Partake their hopes and fears,
And from their lessons seek and find
Instruction with an humble mind.

My hopes are with the dead; anon
  My place with them will be,
And I with them shall travel on
  Through all futurity;
Yet leaving here a name, I trust,
That will not perish in the dust.

Robert Southey.

The Keeper of the Pass

By W. Robert Foran

UNTIL Lieutenant Patrick O'Donovan wrote its name on the map and in the history of India, no one, with the exception of a few political officers and the Ghazis of the Swat Valley, knew whether Mogul Kut was the name of a mountain, a river, or title of a local chieftain.

And the story of how red-haired, slender, youthful Paddy O'Donovan made it a real name is worth the telling. They never tire of it at Mardan —"Mardan where the Guides are, don't you know"—nor, for that matter, throughout all India. White-haired, battle-scarred British officers talk of it proudly still, but not any more proudly than do their olive-skinned, black-bearded brothers-in-arms.

As his name betokens, O'Donovan was a true son of Erin—a fighter to his finger-tips—and it takes an Irishman to make history.

When he had safely passed his examinations at Sandhurst Military College and had been duly gazetted to a second-lieutenancy in the Indian army, O'Donovan applied for and received an appointment to the famous Corps of Guides. Seeing that all the male members of his race for two successive generations had served the corps before him with no mean distinction to themselves and the regiment, it is not to be wondered at that Paddy himself should have elected to serve with them. And, being the son of his father and therefore of the Guides family, he was welcomed to them with the open arms of friendship.

On reaching Mardan, where, ever since its foundation, the famous corps had been quartered in the intervals of bloody campaigns which have most consistently added luster to its proud records and honors, he was carefully drilled in the things that were expected of a Guides' officer and an O'Donovan.

His lessons were not difficult to master, for from his infancy he had absorbed the regimental history, renown, and creeds. He found Mardan less of a garrison station than a regimental home. With the single exception of the Ghurka battalions, the Guides are the only regiment in India which can boast of permanent quarters, and it is here they have stored lovingly and reverently all the Guides' family heirlooms.

He found much of interest in his almost daily pilgrimages round these

heirlooms and almost as much comfort in his frequent visits to the cemetery, where rested a full quota of the hard-fighting heroes of the corps awaiting the last "assembly" call.

This cemetery is, perhaps, the only regimental cemetery in the world, and is fittingly a green and pleasant spot. Beneath its palm-trees have been laid in their last resting-places, close to the fields where they have played and the barracks in which they have lived, the bodies of successive generations of these warriors of the borders who have been killed in action across the bloody frontier. Nor is there any spot in all this world where a soldier might lie in braver company after departing into the great silence.

He found even a homeliness in the little swimming-pool conveniently placed in the gardens of the officers' quarters, and romance—with a big "R"—in the fort where sentries of many types and races faced everlastingly protective over the great abysses of mountain and valley. The very difference in caste and type of these soldiers proved not the least attractive portion of his lesson—for "God's Own," as the Corps of Guides so proudly call themselves, are welded together of the pick of the best fighting races in India.

Stalwart Sikh, wiry Afridi, diminutive but jolly-faced Ghurka, gentlemanly Rajput, and sturdy Dogra—all formed an integral part of this great military unit. And every man of it from the white-haired British commandant down to the latest-joined recruit was in every sense of the word—a man.

There was nothing strange, he soon discovered, in the fact that he had followed into the regiment to which his family had so long been linked; for even the enormously long, white-trousered *sowars* and *sepoys* walked placidly about in the home of their fathers, even as did most of the British officers. The fighting native of India puts down his son's name for the Guides just as naturally as does a member of a most famous and exclusive club in London. Mardan, he learned in course of time, was a concrete example of what makes a regiment—*esprit de corps.*

It was after Paddy O'Donovan had served his usual three years and added his second star to his shoulder-strap that he was overjoyed by the receipt of orders from the commandant to proceed to Mogul Kut with his squadron of Sikh lancers and build a fort on the rim of the Swat Valley to guard a pass through which a broad road was to be built to Chitral.

For several years the government had been content to let the tribes in the Swat Valley stew in their own bloody feuds; it was a matter of prudence. But now it was decided to steadily push forward the frontier, and the road-engineers required adequate protection from the bloodthirsty swashbucklers of the hills. It was an honor to have been chosen for such a work, and both he and his Sikh squadron fully appreciated the fact.

Accompanied by a political officer and an engineer, he gaily led his squadron out of Mardan on their long march to Mogul Kut. Later he was to be left in command of the post and pass, and the country beyond and behind. On his young shoulders were lightly—and confidently, let it be said—balanced the fate of an empire, the lives of his men, and the arduous task of preserving law and order in a country where no man knows whether he will awaken on the morrow to find peace or war.

Glastonbury, the political, was given the duty of finding Mogul Kut Pass, of selecting the best site for the fort, and of seeing that all was well before he returned to Mardan and safety. The engineer was to supervise the building operations. O'Donovan formed the third member, and the most interested one, of the board of sites which was to make a new strangle-hold on the restless border.

Glastonbury and the engineer officer agreed upon a site, but O'Donovan raised his voice in angry protest against it. The weight of opinion was against him. Demur as he might from a military and strategical point of view, the other two had the right and power to overrule him. Paddy O'Donovan, being young but very wise beyond his years, determined to make the best of a bad bargain, as the Guides always do.

"It would take a whole bally Indian army to hold it," he vigorously protested and in deep disgust, as the first stone of the fort's walls was laid in position. "And even then I'll be darned if I see how or what the plan would be."

The political and engineer ignored his protestations. They continued their work in lofty superiority, while Paddy fumed and swore. It did not require even his meager experience in warfare to show him that no worse site could possibly have been selected for the purpose for which it was intended. As day by day the walls grew steadily in height he pleaded with them and urged them to change the site before it was too late.

"You might as well set a box full of lead soldiers upon a rockery," he argued, vehement and pleading in turns, "and expect them to hold it against real troops, as set us up here and ask us to hold the pass. Why"—he waved his hand out over the crowning peaks of the hills that overshadowed the new outpost—"we sha'n't even have a ghost of a show if the Ghazis were ever to attack us; at least, not one in a thousand."

"Are you in charge of the selection of the site or am I, O'Donovan?" haughtily inquired Glastonbury, with a smile of pitying contempt on his lips for the other's youthful ignorance. Glastonbury, trained in the school of diplomacy and political work, had little opinion of the capabilities of soldiers outside of fighting, where hard and cool bravery was necessary. He was at little pains to conceal his contempt.

"No—but I've jolly well got to defend it in case of attack," Paddy answered witheringly. "I'd not be such a confounded ass as to choose such a death-trap as this, if I had the say-so. Why, man alive, look for yourself and see if I'm not speaking common-and-garden horse-sense?" Again he pointed with a sweeping motion of his hand out over the hills. "If we had enough men to hold higher hills than those occupied by the enemy, it might be possible to hold this place against all ordinary attacks; but we haven't enough."

"Well—here's the fort; and here it's going to stay," Glastonbury asserted, and there was finality in his words and tone.

"If this is the usual method of selection," Paddy sneered, in a final attempt to alter the pig-headed fool's opinion, "no wonder the government is always building a fort here, then pulling it down again, and building it elsewhere. It's deucedly fortunate England is a rich country, I'm thinking. You mark my words, Glastonbury, one day—and that not very far off—you'll have occasion to wish that you'd not overruled me in this; and then it'll be too late to cry over spilled milk."

He stalked angrily away, with his head held high in the air. Then he stopped suddenly and looked back, registering one last hit on the target of his senior's conceit. "It's no wonder they say the British Empire is built on the mistakes of its officers, if this is a sample of their errors of judgment."

"Oh, rats!" retorted impolitely the now thoroughly enraged Glastonbury. "You'd far better go back to your nursery than criticise your seniors. Why, O'Donovan, I was working for the good of the frontier before you were out of knickerbockers."

"I'm protesting as much for the sake of the empire, my men's lives,

and the honor of my regiment as anything," Paddy answered soberly—and his face had grown suddenly very serious. "As for my own life, I don't care such an awful lot—but I guess the Guides can do their duty no matter what the odds."

And with this last kick at the irony of fate which had left the selection of a military post to a civilian, when a soldier, thoroughly capable and efficient in his profession, was there to wisely choose, Paddy stalked off to his tent with his head proudly held high in the air.

For the rest of the time that Glastonbury and the engineer were at Mogul Kut not a word was spoken to them by Paddy outside of duty matters; nor did they speak to him. It was, therefore, a great relief to Paddy when finally they turned the newly constructed fort over to him, and took their departure for Mardan.

And then he set to work to study the situation from all possible angles and to take what steps he could to make its defense as feasible and practicable as possible. He knew why he had been sent there, for his orders were plain and simple.

His squadron knew even better than he what their coming meant and what was in store for them; for the Guides know what a frontier feels like, and why frontiers have a habit of never standing still.

They had learned, not from the safety of armchairs before London club fires, the full wisdom of the forward policy of the border, but from the barren peaks looking outward on the green plains between mountain crags and snow-clad ranges.

The fort—as a fort—was something to be proud of. They know how to build forts on the frontier, even if their policy is often open to question in so far as the sites of them are concerned. It was of the type most suitable and generally adopted for use on the border—a walled enclosure surrounding it, built fifteen feet high and two hundred yards square. At each angle of the square was a small, square-shaped watch-tower, little better, it is true, than a commodious sleeping-box for the sentries.

In the center of the wall on the south face was the only entrance—a big, heavy, solid gate. A horn-work protected the horses of the squadron, towers and loopholes permitted the garrison to train their carbines on any attacking foes, and a tall signal-station overlooked the whole, and from it ran the telegraph-wire which they had laid between Mardan and Mogul Kut as they marched to occupy the latter place.

It was their one and only slender communication with help and civilization. Over the gate, supported on heavy beams and strong rafters, ran a continuation of the roofs of his and the native officers' quarters.

On the opposite side were the barracks of the non-commissioned officers and *sowars*. To make things more snug and protective, he built a small, triangular *sangar* of loose boulders on the east face of the fort.

But the site—every time Paddy looked over it he groaned. Mogul Kut Fort stood on a rocky knoll that rose abruptly from the plains leading into the narrow pass and not more than a hundred yards from the mountains.

At first sight it might look impregnable, but closer observation, as it had in the case of Paddy, would convince a trained eye that the fort was dwarfed and its defenses commanded by the frowning cliffs under which it stood. Every open space could be commanded from the mountain ridge; every parapet and tower was exposed to rifle-fire, and an enemy on the ridge above it could look or fire right down into the open square at will.

Before they had been in garrison at the fort for a month the trouble commenced. The *bunniahs*, ever watchful for opportunities to trade, came hurrying forward in their tens and

twenties to fasten themselves upon Mogul Kut.

Paddy knew them for what they really are—vampires. He cursed them under his breath for coming, but knew he had no right to order them back. Yet, to make things more unwelcome for them, he refused point-blank to permit them to live within the fort and set up their stores.

So, in a colony of forty souls they made things miserable for him by camping huddled up as close as they could to the walls. Grant a *bunniah* the semblance of immunity from danger, and he will come to the end of the earth with his wonted impudence. So long as his skin is safe, it is totally impossible to expect ordinary civility, generosity, and gratitude from him.

Finding that their formerly turbulent customers, the Ghazis, now behaved circumspectly from fear of retribution from the military at the fort, the *bunniahs* began to bully them unmercifully. They raised the prices of their goods and stores to exorbitant and iniquitous heights; they insolently declined to wait upon the hillsmen unless it entirely suited their pleasure to do so; and they called their customers insulting names.

Every objection the customers raised to this treatment was met with the threat of the wrath of O'Donovan *Sahib*. Now the fierce hillsmen were not at that moment ready to try conclusions with the military, preferring to wait and test their mettle first before boldly pulling their tail.

Teja Singh, the tall and hard-headed *subadar* of the Sikh squadron, which O'Donovan commanded, came to him and held forth at length and with conviction of certainty in his words as to the lack of wisdom in permitting *bunniahs* to live in general and stay at Mogul Kut in particular.

"*Sahib,*" he protested warningly, and yet respectful in tone and manner, "no good ever came of allowing these sons of pigs to remain near a fort."

"I know, *subadar,*" Paddy answered, shrugging his shoulders; "but what the devil am I to do? I can't chase them away, for they've a perfect right to trade here so long as they behave themselves and don't break the law. Moreover, they're entitled to our protection within limitations."

"You speak like a wise man, *sahib,* the son of wise men," the old soldier agreed; "yet they will cause us trouble before many days have passed."

"You know, as well as I know, *subadar,*" Paddy asserted, aggressively thumping his fist on his office table, "that if I had my way, every mother's son of 'em would be kicked out of here and sent back to Mardan to rot there in their own stew-pot of iniquity."

"They're fit only for the knives of the tribesmen," chuckled the *subadar,* as he grinned in his young leader's angry face; "and it's the knives they'll be feeling before long."

"What's up, now?" wearily inquired Paddy, for he was already sick to death of hearing of the complaints of disorder and roguery from the den of thieves that huddled against his walls.

Teja Singh told him quickly and without mincing words the true state of affairs in the *bunniahs'* camp. He told him of their insolence and their extortion, and of the threats they made to the fierce hillsmen to keep them quiet when they objected to being robbed.

And as the tale unfolded Paddy O'Donovan's face grew redder and redder with rage. When Teja Singh finally told him that the name of O'Donovan *Sahib* was being freely used as a cloak to their misdemeanors, Paddy's wrath found expression in oaths.

"Confound them! What fearful cheek!" he exploded angrily. "I'll make them pay for this before I'm through with the swine!"

"*Ai, sahib.* The thieving scoundrels are as good liars as they are robbers."

Teja Singh knew the tribe of *bunniah,* for he was a Jat Sikh of Taran Taran, and had long experience in the Hills of the Borders. "If the *sahib* will listen to the humble counsel of his servant, then he will go and see these sons of pigs and order them to leave Mogul Kut at once."

Paddy rose to his feet, with his face set in rigid lines of determination. He would at least warn them that any repetition of the abuse of his name would be most summarily dealt with. The angry light in his eyes boded no good for the offending *bunniahs.*

Followed by Teja Singh and Besant Singh, his *sowar* orderly, Paddy led the way across the open square of the fort to the gate and passed outside, making with long strides in the direction of the wretched hovels in which the *bunniahs* lived and traded. They were an uninviting-looking collection, built out of tattered tents long past the days of their utility, reeds from the river-bed, old torn sacks, stones, and empty kerosene cans.

As they approached the motley and filthy bazaar, O'Donovan's sharp ears caught the sound of quarreling, followed by a shrill scream of pain and fear. He burst into a run, with the two native soldiers close at his heels.

They arrived just in time to prevent the murder of Yad Ram, one of the *bunniahs,* by four evil-looking Ghazis. They promptly arrested all five of the wranglers, and seeing Yad Ram's wound was only a slight flesh cut, dragged them profusely protesting inside the fort.

Patiently O'Donovan listened to both sides of the case. It appeared that Yad Ram had endeavored to fleece the four hillsmen. After he had taken their money he refused to give them the goods they desired in exchange, and, instead, attempted to frighten them away with threats of the anger of the *sahib.*

Paddy O'Donovan was a Solomon, as far as settling native disputes was concerned. His sympathies were with the four hillsmen, but both parties must be punished if law and order was to be preserved in the hill-country.

He ordered Yad Ram to leave the district and return to Mardan, and gave him distinct orders that if he ever showed his face near the fort again he would be flogged and sent to jail for two years.

The Ghazis, though plainly the aggrieved parties, had to be taught they could not settle their disputes by recourse to their murderous knives and by the custom of the bloody hills.

He explained to them that all such disputes must in future be brought to the *Raj* for settlement. He told them he was the sole arbiter, the Omnipotent of Mogul Kut and all within its sphere of influence. Then he sentenced the four wondering hillsmen to be flogged in the square of the fort as a punishment for their taking the settlement of the law into their own hands.

It was the crafty ingenuity of Teja Singh which added the final touch of indignity to the punishment. After the four culprits had been soundly flogged, Paddy ordered them to be turned loose and told to return to their village. Teja Singh waited until the young subaltern had left the scene before completing the last part of his orders. Before the four tribesmen were turned loose, Teja Singh had seen to it that their faces were blackened with soot.

Now, a Ghazi, though by nature a bloodthirsty, cruel, treacherous scoundrel, yet is decidedly a man. He has a keen sense of *izzat,* and has, therefore, a rigid sense of his honor and all things appertaining thereto. Their code is as different from ours as is their religion, but none the less severe and stringent.

It is considered a very shameful thing to be flogged in public because of the exposure of their persons, and it is equally shameful to have their faces blackened. The punishment, therefore, meted out to them by O'Donovan *Sahib* and Teja Singh

filled their hearts with a great fear, and the news quickly spread from castle to castle, clan to clan, hill to hill, and village to village, so that presently all the Swat hills and valleys knew what the red-headed young subaltern of Guides would do to wrong-doers at Mogul Kut.

They cared not one jot for their own lives nor any one else's; but they did care for their *izzat*. In many ways the sentences were wise ones, for it cooled, at least for a brief space, the murderous tendencies of the swash-bucklers from the hills; and they, in common with the *bunniahs*, learned that O'Donovan *Sahib* and *Subadar* Teja Singh had no mind to be trifled with.

Now, Yad Ram, the *bunniah*, was foolish in his estimation of the lengths to which he could go, and did not profit by the lesson taught him by the Ghazis and O'Donovan *Sahib*. Instead of doing as he had been ordered, he decided to remain in the hills and carry on his evil-trading deals while peace reigned in the country.

The Ghazis smarted under the shame that had come to them through Yad Ram's roguery, and they suffered daily from the taunts of the other *bunniahs*, who had now become overbearingly autocratic and insulting. They came to the conclusion, these fierce tribesmen, finally that something drastic must be done to regain their *izzat*.

It might have occurred to them to appeal to O'Donovan *Sahib* for relief from the insults and other abuses of the *bunniahs*. It might also have occurred to them to report to him the continued trading in the hills of Yad Ram. But the Ghazis, like all other hill tribes on the border, have been used from their infancy to rely each man upon himself and to work out their own salvation by knife or rifle.

Moreover, they were afraid that further complaint from them would only excite the *sahib's* and Teja Singh's contempt and a vigorous expression of it. Which tends to show how little they really understood the *Raj* and its ministrations.

The method of dealing with the matter which did finally occur to them was by no means original for the hills, but it was eminently practical from their view-point. It was the most natural outcome of their bloody-minded characters. Some one had to be killed to purge the shame to their *izzat*, and the most natural selection of a victim was, of course, Yad Ram. So they held counsel together in the hills as to ways and means, and eventually decided upon a course of action.

Six men were secretly sent out one night to Yad Ram's camp with orders to bring his dead body to the gate of the fort under cover of darkness and leave it there for the *sahib* to see that their *izzat* had been purged.

So silently did they do their bloody work that no one in the fort was aware of their coming with their gruesome burden, nor of their departure, until daylight revealed the corpse lying huddled outside the gate. An astonished Sikh *sowar* gave the alarm, and O'Donovan and the *subadar* were hastily summoned to view the remains and investigate.

They recognized the body as that of Yad Ram by his clothing, for even his own mother could not have recognized him by other means, so well had the fiendish revenge of the Ghazis done the foul deed. Yad Ram's face had been so slashed with knives that his eyes, nose, and mouth were all confounded in one horrible wound.

"It is good, *sahib*," Teja Singh chuckled, gleeful at the end which had come to his hated *bunniah*. "The son of a pig deserved to die thus. May he rot in a foul grave."

Paddy shivered, for the sight of that horrible face was ghastly, and he was not yet used to such horrors. "He did deserve to die," he answered. "Yet the murderers must be punished. I can't allow such things to happen," he added decisively, and gave orders for the disposal of the corpse.

"Let well alone, *sahib,*" advised Teja Singh respectfully. "I have lived and worked too long in the hills not to understand these people and their ways. It is only the beginning of the bloody work, and presently we shall have our hands full with a vengeance. Once they taste blood, they want more."

"You may be right, *subadar,*" Paddy answered thoughtfully, his face growing grave. "Come—let's go and warn the *bunniahs* to leave here at once, for it's not safe for them to remain where they are, and I won't permit them to live inside the fort."

As they walked over to the hovels they were amazed to hear no sign nor see movement of life. All was as still as the grave.

"It seems," chuckled Teja Singh, "the Ghazis have not rested at one. The sons of pigs are, however, the root of all evil, and if they have been killed it is good for the peace of the country."

The first hovel they entered disclosed the mangled remains of the *bunniah* who had lived therein. In the next, and in every one, they found nothing but horribly cut and dead traders. The Ghazis, not content with carrying out the exact letter of their orders as regards Yad Ram, had improved upon them.

Silently stealing into every hovel that night, they had expeditiously despatched each and every one of the *bunniahs.* When their grim inspection was over, and the bodies had been dragged out into the sunlight and laid in rows, O'Donovan, feeling sick at heart and at stomach, left the disposal of the dead in the hands of Teja Singh.

"It's ghastly," he shuddered as he left the Sikh *subadar;* "and the murderers must be punished. I can't permit such outrages in my country to go unpunished."

"It'll be our turn next," grinned the *subadar,* as he summoned some *sowars* to work at the disposal of the dead.

From inside the fort, O'Donovan presently saw a cloud of white smoke rising from outside the walls. He presumed that the *subadar* was burning the hovels that death had emptied, and paid no further attention to the matter. But the *subadar* and his eager *sowars* were disposing of the dead *bunniahs* by burning their bodies on a funeral pyre made out of the hovels in which they had stewed. So in one act was the cesspool of iniquity and the *bunniahs* disposed of, and a greater insult meted out to the hated traders.

Ten minutes later a party of ten *sowars* trotted out of the gate and headed for the village of the Khan, whose men were suspected of being responsible for the outrage. They had orders from O'Donovan to endeavor to persuade the Khan to come in and talk the matter over with the commandant of the fort.

In three hours they galloped hot-haste back to the fort and reported that the hills were filled with tribesmen, who had sniped at them and driven them back. O'Donovan and Teja Singh discussed the situation, and finally decided it would be wise to send a telegram to Mardan to report that a native uprising was possible. Then they set to work to strengthen the fortifications and to practise the men in taking stations upon a sudden alarm.

Toward nightfall, O'Donovan doubled the sentries on the walls, and warned them to listen carefully and watch for signs of the enemy's approach. Satisfied that all was well and that he had done the best he could, he retired to his quarters to eat his dinner. He had scarcely seated himself at the little table when there suddenly came the crash of musketry from the hills overlooking the fort.

Outside in the square a trumpeter lustily sounded "Alarm," quickly followed by "Assembly."

Not waiting even to fasten on his sword-belt, Paddy leaped to his feet and buckled it as he ran to the gate.

The *subadar* was falling in the men, and they had all lined up when he reached them.

Quickly and coolly he gave them their orders for the defense of the fort, while the enemy's bullets dropped into the square and droned harmlessly overhead. After the garrison had taken up their posts there was a deathly silence for a few minutes, which gave them a chance to collect themselves. Then again came the roar of musketry, and several *sowars* fell, mortally wounded.

Paddy ran to the signal tower, hastily clambered up the steps, and gave the telegraphist orders to send a message to Mardan calling for help, for he knew that he could not hold out long if the whole country was up in arms. That was the last message to get through, but it was enough.

Immediately on its receipt the Guides sent forth half a battalion of infantry and two squadrons of cavalry to the succor of their hardly pressed comrades. Their march was a record-breaking one, but they had many miles to go; and O'Donovan knew only too well that he could not expect help until at least a week had passed.

As he left the signal-tower to return to the walls and superintend the defense his ears caught the faint flapping of the union jack against the flagstaff in the night breeze, and the sound gave him courage for the man's task that was before him. He would keep that flag flying, no matter at what cost, and the pass should be protected. The Guides had never failed, and he would not smudge their records by thought of failure.

The carbines of the *sowars* were vigorously returning the fire of the tribesmen, but darkness made the effect practically nil. He cautioned them to wait for the flash of a rifle in the hills and to fire back at it, and meanwhile directed the steady fusillade of the little Maxim gun which was trained on the near-by hill. The constant *rat-a-rat-tat* of the brave, little quick-firer was sweet music in his ears—and he laughed aloud.

Teja Singh heard the laugh and smiled. He knew that this was the first taste of warfare the young subaltern had had, and he could tell by that laugh O'Donovan *Sahib* was as all the Guides' officers and his illustrious forefathers—a man and a born soldier.

When day broke at last they saw the hills surrounding the fort black with the tribesmen, and above them fluttered their many-colored standards. The Ghazis pressed on down to the walls of the fort, but were driven back with heavy losses. Above the din of the rifle and Maxim fire, and the shouts of the savage hillsmen, sounded the defiant war-cry of the Sikh *sowars:*

"Wah! Guru! Guru!"

Paddy O'Donovan chortled silently to himself as he heard it. He knew that there was no thought of surrender, nothing but certainty of victory, in that deep-throated, guttural call of war. With men of the same mind as himself, he felt all his confidence return to him.

Later in the day the tribesmen advanced to a renewed attack, carrying scaling-ladders with them. A deadly fire received them, and they drew off once more and contented themselves by keeping up an annoying and desultory fire into the fort. Sikh *sowar* after *sowar* fell under this sniping, and the native hospital assistant was overworked attending to the wounded.

Paddy took an opportunity during the lull in the fighting to check his ammunition and food supplies. He estimated that they had enough to hold out for two weeks with care, but no longer. The Guides would surely come to their aid before that. If only they could hold off the thousands of the Ghazis until relief came to them the pass and fort would be safe.

He warned his men again and again to save all the ammunition they could, and never to fire unless they

were pretty sure of hitting their target. The Sikhs were in their element and needed no further advice. As each man carefully picked off a tribesman he chuckled and reloaded, waiting for another mark to show so that another dead Ghazi might be added to the bag.

The bullets fell incessantly all day into the fort, and many of the men had very narrow escapes, while others less fortunate were carried back, groaning, to the temporary hospital. Some had fallen dead at their posts, and these were carefully carried away until there was a chance to dispose of them according to Hindu ritual for burial.

On the second day the Ghazis attacked once more during the heat of midday. They surrounded the north and west sides of the fort, and made a bold bid to break inside of it; but with heavy losses they were driven back by the rifles of the defense, leaving their many dead scattered thickly about the open ground before the walls. These were removed under cover of darkness without interference from the garrison.

Up in the signal-tower the *sowar* telegraphist sat at his post, unmindful of the rain of bullets, waiting and watching for sign of the approach of the relief force, which all knew must have started immediately on receipt of the news of the attack on Mogul Kut.

Toward night the attackers prepared for another attempt to force the defenses. With shouts and yells of fanatical zeal they charged behind, beating drums right up to the walls of the fort, some of the standard-bearers not stopping in their mad rush until they fell, riddled with bullets, at the base of the wall. Again the scaling-ladders were placed against the walls only to be thrown down repeatedly by the gallant *sowars*.

Their desperate charge was finally repulsed, but with heavy loss to each side. A stray bullet tore through the flesh of Paddy's left arm, but he quietly held it out to Teja Singh to bind up, and continued to direct the operations of the defense. Always dancing before his eyes was the vision of the lovely arch and garden, which a tardy government had erected to the memory of a mere handful of the men of the Guides who had all died at their post round Cavagnari in Kabul.

The vision gave him infinite consolation. If needs must be they could emulate that noble example of the courage and faithfulness to duty of the illustrious corps.

For a whole week the days were a repetition of the first, and each day found the garrison weaker in numbers and strength, yet stronger and more determined at heart. Were they not the Guides? they asked themselves. Then how could any enemy take their post from them?

At sunset on the seventh day of the defense the Maxim was put out of commission, and O'Donovan groaned. He could ill afford to lose the services of the vicious-spitting and useful weapon, which had already proved a tower of strength to them.

For something like one hundred and sixty-eight hours they had been continually on the watch and defensive, snatching only what food they could and sleeping only in brief respites, and that only when the firing died down into fitful sniping.

Their eyes were ever cast anxiously toward Mardan, like the men in a sinking ship who see themselves growing hourly weaker and their chances of rescue less. But so far no sign nor hint of help had appeared. Their utter weariness began to show in their muttered curses and drooping bodies as they continued returning the heavy fire of the Ghazis.

Their eyes were red and inflamed from lack of proper sleep and powder-smoke, and their minds tortured with anxiety as to the ultimate outcome; but they still fought on bravely,

determined to die rather than yield. To yield would be to die, anyhow, for, even if the Ghazis should by some unheard-of freak spare their prisoners, they knew they could never face and live through the gibes of the men of "God's Own."

The *sowars* began to fall asleep at their posts on the parapet of the wall. Even during the spasmodic attacks of the Ghazis insulted and outraged nature asserted itself, so that time and time again the *sowars* dropped off fast asleep in the very act of reloading their carbines.

Paddy and Teja Singh, with haggard faces but tireless bodies, were here, there, and everywhere, encouraging and arousing them to greater efforts.

With a brave but wan smile O'Donovan assured them repeatedly that the British *raj* and the Guides would never let them be captured nor wiped out. If they would only fight on, and could only hold out, they would in course of time be relieved. If relief came too late to save them, their deaths would be a thousandfold revenged. And the worn-out Sikhs cheered their young leader lustily again and again, sending forth their fierce *"Wah! Guru! Guru!"* over the fort's walls at the attacking Ghazis.

Something of infinite and pathetic trust in their white officer, something of a dim, idolatrous faith in the corps they served and the *raj* whose uniform they wore, restored their fainting strength—and they continued nobly fighting what seemed like a lost cause.

On the eighth day, as morning broke over the scene of the bloody conflict, there came a glad shout from the signaler, who had heroically maintained his lookout in the signal-tower, despite the murderous fire sustained upon it. And a few seconds later he was working his heliograph in response to a tiny, glittering speck which flickered and winked at them from the far hills behind the Ghazis' position.

The *sowars* saw it and set up a glad shout, triumphant now that help was near, and sent volley after volley crashing into the thick masses of the enemy, which were just as vigorously returned. Teja Singh crawled along the parapet of the wall until he reached Paddy.

"Relief is coming, *sahib!*" he said proudly, his eyes shining bright with happiness. "The Guides never fail!" he added simply. "'God's Own' are coming, and they'll be proud of you, *Sahib Bahadur!*"

"Thanks, *subadar,*" Paddy grinned, and shook the old soldier's outstretched hand like a pump-handle. "I owe just as much to you as to the *sowars* for our successful defense."

"It was the leader, *Sahib Bahadur,* who made it possible to defend this trust," Teja Singh smiled proudly into the reddening face of the subaltern. And he crawled hastily back to where a renewed attack of the Ghazis threatened to carry the defenses.

Another glad shout, joyous and triumphant, from the signal-tower made Paddy train his field-glasses in the direction of the hills where relief was coming from. He caught the flutter of Lancers' pennants and glitter of lance-points in the sunlight down in the valley below them. Then presently he saw two squadrons of the Guides' cavalry galloping toward the fort in extended formation.

He watched these strong-armed horsemen mercilessly pursue and cut down all who opposed them in their gallop toward the fort, above which to their joy they could see the union jack still flying bravely. The enemy held their ground and made one last vigorous assault upon the gallant garrison.

The firing became intense, bullets splashed and scarred the walls in every direction, and despite the cover afforded by them many of the stubborn Sikhs were either killed or wounded

by the hail of bullets. Teja Singh, standing up boldly to watch the operations of the relief force, received a bullet through both cheeks, and spat out teeth and blood with angry snarls.

Ignoring the proffered aid of a *sowar,* he continued to encourage the men to fire back into the masses of the Ghazis, punctuating his orders with angry Sikh oaths and a steady spitting of blood.

Finally the enemy, realizing that their game was up, turned to run for safety. This was the chance Paddy O'Donovan had waited and watched for, and he seized it. Leaping down from the wall into the open square, he shouted orders for half of the *sowars* to join him and make a sortie. Teja Singh he left to take charge of the remainder of the reduced garrison and hold the fort.

Flinging open the massive, bullet-dented gate, and followed by some thirty *sowars,* O'Donovan ran at top speed after the retreating hillsmen. Shouting hoarsely their vindictive *"Wah! Guru! Guru!"* the *sowars* followed close at his heels. A few minutes later they were cutting and slashing their way through and through the flying Ghazis.

The enemy made a last determined stand in the *sangar,* which Paddy had built on the eastern spur of the hill, but they could not hold off the determined onslaught of the sortie and finally were driven pell-mell from it just as the leading troop of the relief cavalry appeared on the far end of the hilltop.

The last Ghazi to leave the *sangar* turned and deliberately shot O'Donovan through the chest, but his honor of having severely wounded a *Sahib* was short lived. Foaming at the mouth with blood from his wound, O'Donovan leaped upon him and cut him almost in two with a powerful sweep of his saber.

Then he fell back unconscious into the arms of one of his *sowars.* It was the end of the fighting.

The *sowars* tenderly lifted up their officer and carried him back toward the gate of the fort, now thrown open to receive the Guides' cavalry troop which had appeared to help them so opportunely.

Teja Singh, coming out from the fort with blood still streaming from his wounded face to welcome his comrades, caught sight of the sad bearer-party. Instantly he ran toward them, ignoring the cavalry riding toward the gate. With a wail of angry sorrow he ordered the *sowars* to place their leader's insensible body upon the ground.

With a devotion as tender as a mother's, he bent down and lifted O'Donovan *Sahib* in his own arms and carried him carefully into the fort and handed him over to the weary hospital assistant for attention.

The full relief force had entered the fort or camped around it before O'Donovan opened his eyes. As he blinked uncertainly in the feeble light of the oil-lamp he saw the faces of Teja Singh and the commandant of the Guides looking pitifully at him.

At the first sign of returning life, Teja Singh threw himself on his knees beside the camp-cot on which O'Donovan had been placed in the temporary hospital, and had to be almost dragged away by the anxious surgeon who had now assumed charge of the hospital.

"He lives, Allah be praised!" devoutly exclaimed the old *Subadar.* His face was even fiercer-looking than usual in his blood-stained bandage, but his eyes shone with unspeakable thankfulness and tenderness.

"Will he do now, doctor?" asked the Guides' commandant as he bent over his young officer.

"Yes, it's a clean wound, and we'll have him on his pins in a few weeks. Luckily the bullet missed his heart and only grazed his lungs. It might have been worse — much worse," answered the doctor, working over the subaltern with deft fingers trained to heal wounds from bullet or saber.

"Thank God for that!" fervently exclaimed the commandant. "We can't afford to lose officers like young O'Donovan. By Gad!" the fiery old colonel's face reddened under the deep tan of thirty years' service in India—"he's a chip of the old O'Donovans I've served under. Never knew what it was to quit, and never said die!"

Paddy smiled feebly and patted Teja Singh's hand.

"I'm all right—really," he said slowly, with eyes glittering with pride of his achievement in maintaining the tradition of the corps.

"Don't talk now, O'Donovan," cautioned the surgeon, holding up a warning finger.

Glastonbury, the political, at that moment hastened in to inquire how the young commander of the fort was getting on. The sight of him was too much for O'Donovan's sense of obedience to the orders of the doctor.

"I told you so, Glastonbury," he said in gasps. "The blasted fort was hell to hold—the blighters could shoot right down into us. Knew it—at once; but you wouldn't believe it."

Glastonbury looked very foolish and hung his head.

"We'll have to move it," he admitted slowly. "You were right, old man, and I'm really awfully sorry for my stupidity and pigheadedness. I ought to have known better and listened to you."

O'Donovan smiled weakly.

"Of course—" he said, feebly, and his smile broadening, "no one but—the Guides could have held it against such big odds."

The white-haired commandant of the corps held his head up proudly.

"You're right, young'un," he agreed. "It takes a corps like 'God's Own' to hold what would be impossible for other troops."

At a signal from the doctor the visitors withdrew, as perfect quiet was necessary for O'Donovan's recovery.

In the mean time the commandant had sent out the cavalry to pursue the Ghazis and teach them a lasting lesson. They did their work well, as only Indian cavalry know how, and two days later the Khan sent in a white flag and sued for peace.

After the terms of surrender had been arranged, the commandant of the Guides went to visit O'Donovan. He carried with him a telegram that had just been received from the commander-in-chief at Simla.

"Listen, O'Donovan," the commandant warned as he proceeded to read the message. "The commander-in-chief wires me: 'Well done, God's Own. Congratulations to the keeper of the pass and you on their relief. News of the successful defense and relief received with profound thankfulness throughout India. Secretary of State cables the gallantry of your corps received with cheers in House of Commons.'"

"I'm glad, sir," O'Donovan said simply, his eyes still bright with pride.

"You've made us all very proud of you, Paddy," the commandant assured him, "and you've won your spurs in the corps in a most gallant fashion. The O'Donovans may well be proud of the youngest of their clan."

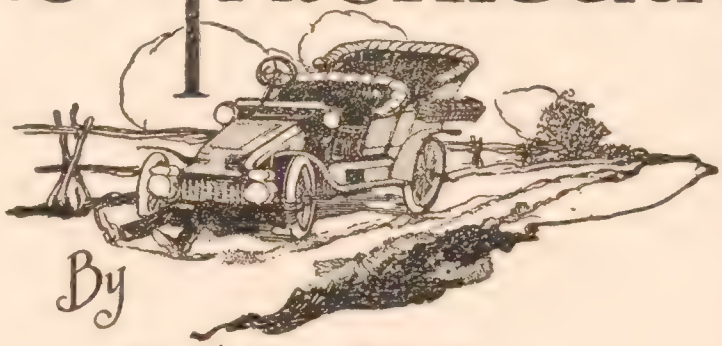
And long after the colonel had left him, O'Donovan was awakened from his happy reverie by a respectful touch on his hand. He had not heard any one enter the room and looked to see who had come. He saw Teja Singh kneeling at his side. The old *Subadar* raised the boy's hand to his lips in homage.

"*Sahib Bahadur!*" he whispered reverently. "You're a man after our own hearts—a man among men."

O'Donovan knew that the old man's words meant more than all the honor he could be given by cheers in the House of Commons, or decorations, for the Guides from commandant to trumpeter had made him one of themselves forever.

And that is the greatest honor there is for any soldier to have.

Auto-Intoxication



By E. Allen Phillips

WHEN the Conleys had accumulated two hundred dollars and placed it to their credit in the savings-bank they began to refer to automobiles as "machines" and to notice the body-lines of the different makes so they could tell one from the other as they passed—from which it will be surmised that the Conleys had ambitions.

By the time the savings account had grown to three hundred dollars the Conleys could tell the name of almost any machine on the street a block away, and turned their attention to a discussion of the relative merits of carbureters and magnetos.

Jack Conley and his wife had talked the matter over many, many times, and had finally decided that almost anybody else could not afford a machine on a salary the size of Jack's. But they had decided it was different with them, and they had it all figured out how they could spare enough to buy oil, gasoline, and tires, and leave a small margin to live on, provided they could scrape together the price of a machine to begin with.

Their total resources consisted of Jack's salary and an ability to save when occasion required or necessity compelled. This being an "occasion required," they began with a will and ate fruit in season instead of eggs for breakfast, cut out the theater, and practised other economies well-known to the great army of those who depend on salaries for a livelihood.

Even with all these sacrifices they found it harder to save than it was to get out of debt in the preceding years. They had set their mark at one thousand dollars, which would be sufficient to buy a new machine, but when the bank account had grown to more than three hundred dollars they began to look longingly at the advertisements for second-hand autos—only it wasn't long before they dropped the term "second-hand" and began to call them "used cars."

When the Conleys could point with pride to four hundred dollars in cash all their own they definitely decided not to wait until they had accumulated one thousand dollars, but to buy a "used car," which they decided they could get for half that sum.

When they had acquired four hundred and fifty dollars, Mr. and Mrs. Conley indulged themselves with a violent quarrel over whether they should keep the top up or down. This quarrel ended in a compromise; it didn't last long, for both were anxious

to get back to an amicable discussion of the merits and demerits of various automobiles and accessories.

It was at this period of their finances that they decided to disclose their plans to some of their friends. Conley announced the fact that he was to have an automobile one day at the office, and Mrs. Conley broke the news to her neighbors the same day.

It was at this period that they ceased referring to automobiles as "machines"; such contrivances were now "cars" in the Conley vocabulary.

So when Conley made his announcement at the office it was in a sort of casual way in the course of a general conversation during a lull in the business of the office. He stated that he was financially in shape and had decided to buy a "car."

"Street-car, box car, or hand-car?" inquired the head bookkeeper, peering over his horn rims at Conley.

Jack ignored him.

"Going to buy a second-hand machine?" asked the cashier, turning around on his high stool.

"I am going to buy a 'used car'," corrected Conley.

"Oh," said the cashier as he turned back to the window, and Jack didn't like the way he said it at all.

The head bookkeeper grinned and bent over his ledger, and two or three of the clerks looked puzzled as if they were not exactly sure what a "used car" was. Conley did not see any very good way to prolong the conversation, so he kept still, feeling that his announcement had not made the impression that it ought. But he comforted himself with the thought that he soon would be able to ride down to the office in his own "car," and perhaps they would sit up and take notice then.

He was somewhat indignant over the apparent lack of interest, or skepticism, he couldn't tell which. He intended to confide in Mrs. Conley when he went home that night, but found that she had had more troubles than he had.

She had met with decidedly chilly receptions from her neighbors, and in one or two cases sarcastic remarks had followed the imparting of the information that they were to have a "car." Mrs. Conley, being a young woman of spirit, resented this attitude on the part of her neighbors, and as a result was not on speaking terms with any one in the block by the time Jack came home.

"I just don't want a five-passenger car," asserted Mrs. Conley, almost tearfully, after she had related her experience with her neighbors. "We'll just get a runabout, that's what we'll do," she added vindictively, "and then there won't be any room for the neighbors, and I don't care either."

After Jack's experience at the office he was disgruntled enough himself to fall in with the plan, and it was settled on the spot that they would buy a two-passenger instead of a five-passenger, as they had been planning to do.

In order to acquire an education and be prepared to act the moment that the rising bank account touched the five-hundred mark, Jack went through all the "Things-on-wheels" advertisements in the classified columns of the next Sunday morning paper. The result was a collection of a dozen or so clippings of various makes of automobiles which the Conleys decided would do for them provided they came up to the specifications embodied in the advertisements.

Guided by these clippings, Jack started in quest of an "education" respecting "used cars." He was firmly decided not to purchase, but only to look, talk, and bargain. The first advertisement he picked up read:

> For Sale—Classy forty-horse-power runabout; tires almost new; just repainted; fore doors and all ready to climb the steepest hill. Best bargain in town. Come early as this won't last long at the price we are offering it.

The advertisement directed prospective purchasers to call at a certain

address on the outskirts of the business district. On reaching the place Conley found it to be a dingy little frame building in the rear of an unoccupied cottage which looked out of place in the row of small stores which shut it in on each side.

Jack walked up the narrow driveway past the cottage, and was met at the open door of the building in the rear by a sleek, red-faced man, who greeted him cheerily. Jack produced his clipping, and the sleek man led him inside where there were two or three nondescript automobiles and parts of others scattered about.

Near the door was a big, red, newly painted runabout, which Jack at once guessed was the machine advertised. It was not up to his expectations at all. It looked big and clumsy and awkward and out-of-date, and while it was fairly well painted, that did not cover the fact that it evidently had seen hard usage.

The red-faced man was a master salesman. He always talked with his muffler open, and when he had sized up his present customer he opened the cut-out and dilated on the beauties and merits of the automobile in question with such explosiveness and vehemence that a little knot of people gathered at the entrance to the driveway to see what the riot was about.

"She sure is a beauty of a little boat," loudly asserted the salesman. "There isn't another bus in this town that can catch up to her in a year for style or speed, and she'll take all the people you can pile on her up the Crag Hill grade on the high without a sputter—" *et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.*

He stopped for breath an instant, and Conley mildly inquired the price.

"Never you mind the price," broke in the red-faced man. "I'll make that so low you will be ashamed to turn it down; you won't dare to refuse it. All I want to know is whether you really want a car. If you do, just consider that I have sold you this one.

"It is my own special car, and I wouldn't sell it at any price except that I received word last night that my father died in the East and I have got to get there in time for the funeral on Tuesday, and this is the only way I have of raising the money quick. I'll be back from the East in a couple of weeks, and if you don't like the car I'll buy it back from you at two hundred dollars more than you paid for it. Get in and we'll float round the block in her."

Conley was dazed, and before he knew it he was being pushed into the machine by the insistent salesman. Jack settled helplessly into the seat and the red-faced man hurried round in front and seized the crank. Twice he spun the engine furiously without result, and then stood up and mopped his face, that was redder than ever with the exertion.

"She usually goes just by turning her over," he said confidently. "All she needs now is to have the magneto recharged. I ought to have spent a dollar on that before I tried to sell her, but I didn't have time to tune her up after I got word that father was dead."

He walked round to the steering-wheel and adjusted the hand-throttle. Then he went back to the crank, spat on his hands, and gave it a powerful turn. This time he obtained results with a vengeance.

Pht-pht-pht! pop! boom! rattle! crash! roar! went the old machine, which vibrated so it nearly shook Conley off the seat. Before the red-faced man could hurry around to the side and climb into the seat the building was so full of blue smoke that Conley could hardly locate the open door.

He hung on with both hands and blinked through the smudge, hardly knowing whether to be frightened or not. Suddenly he heard a smash as the gears locked and the automobile roared out of the door into the sunlight, making more commotion than a Vanderbilt cup-racer.

The little group of men who had gathered at the entrance to the driveway scattered precipitately as the roaring monster rushed at them, and Conley and his companion bounced up from the seat as they crossed the gutter and turned to the left on the pavement.

They lumbered on around the block about fifteen miles an hour, though the machine made so much fuss Conley thought they must be going about thirty-five. He looked back and saw a long cloud of blue smoke in their wake. The salesman saw the movement and yelled in Conley's ear:

"I put a lot of oil in her this morning; as soon as that is burned out some she won't smoke a bit. When all that oil gets worked into the machinery she won't make any more noise than a watch."

They came round to the deserted cottage again without any accident save for a shaking-up. The group of men were still there, and parted respectfully to make way for the machine, which bumped across the gutter and into the frame building at the rear, where it brought up with a final snort.

It was so quiet after the motor stopped running that Conley's ears fairly hurt. It didn't last long, however, for the red-faced man turned to Conley, threw one knee over the other, and opened up on his customer with a broadside of praise for the machine, mingled with explanations of why it didn't run better.

"A little more oil and about five or ten dollars for a mechanic to look over and adjust the motor and she won't make a rattle," he declared as he clambered out of the machine and motioned Conley to dismount also. "She pulls like a traction engine now," he continued as he stood off a few steps and admiringly contemplated the steaming runabout. As Jack stood beside him he unconsciously became imbued with the same spirit of enthusiasm.

"How much do you think I am asking for this grand machine?" demanded Jack's companion, and then, without giving an opportunity for a reply, he continued: "About seven hundred dollars spot cash would be a reasonable price, wouldn't it?" And again, without waiting for a reply, he answered the questions himself: "Yes, sir-e-e-e, that would not only be reasonable, it would be dirt cheap and far and away the best used-car bargain in the city to-day."

Conley prided himself that he was some talker himself, but he was perfectly helpless in the thrall of this man's tongue.

"Get in and run her round the block yourself," he urged, pushing Conley into the automobile.

"But I can't drive a car," protested Jack, getting in nevertheless.

"I'll show you in about a minute," was the reply, and the salesman showed his customer how to shift the gears and work the clutch and put on the brakes. Then he went round in front and filled the building with noise and smoke.

Once more the two men in the auto emerged from the smoke-filled door amid the usual rattle and hubbub, only this time Conley sat behind the wheel, which was steadied, however, by the hand of the red-faced man. For the first time Jack experienced the thrill of a live, moving, throbbing automobile under him, responding to his touch on the wheel and the pressure of his foot upon the throttle.

This sensation proved his undoing, and when the red-faced man cut his price of seven hundred dollars in half Conley was unable to resist, and forgot all about his determination to acquire an "education" before investing his money.

Conley experienced considerable satisfaction the following morning at the mild sensation caused at the office by his announcement that he owned a car. He ignored all irrelevant questions as to where it was and why he

didn't drive it down and show it off, and all day long the vision of an imposing big red runabout standing majestically under a rough shed in the back yard of a cottage in the suburbs danced before his eyes.

Ambitious as he was to show it off, Jack was wise enough not to attempt to drive the machine to the office through the down-town traffic until he had practised with it a little.

Shortly before closing time that night Jack hid his hat under his coat and slipped unnoticed out of the back door of the office and caught an early street-car for his home. He found his wife in a state of almost hysterical excitement, eagerly awaiting his coming. She had rigged up an automobile head-dress out of her last summer's hat and an old veil, which she had arranged over the hat so the ends would tie under the chin. Jack pronounced it stunning.

The Conleys lost no time in repairing to the back yard, where the machine had been driven under the shed. Jack looked carefully over all the tires and found them full of air; then he adjusted the mechanism and went round in front to crank it. He heaved and tugged at the crank some time before he could turn it over, and when he did that was all there was to it. He had no idea the thing cranked so hard.

Meantime, the neighbors had seen him come home, and began to flock round the back fences and peer over to see how the machine worked. About a dozen children climbed on the fence at different points and watched the automobile owner as he strained at the obstreperous crank.

Jack worked feverishly without result; then readjusted the gasoline feed and tried it again; then he turned the magneto on and off a couple of times and tried it once more; then he gave it a little less gasoline and made another attempt.

Suggestions began to come from the neighbors and children ranged round the back fence. They were mostly of a facetious nature and not calculated to increase Conley's efficiency as an automobile expert.

"Is it a self-starter?" innocently inquired a tousled little girl perched on the fence nearest the machine.

Conley gritted his teeth and made one final, desperate effort and spun the engine. He was rewarded with two explosions, which gave him encouragement, and he bent to his task with renewed energy.

Mrs. Conley became tired of standing, and sat down on a soap-box to await developments. Several times Conley managed to obtain a spark or two, and this kept up his waning spirits.

A few minutes before sundown something happened. Though it was what he had been trying to do for an hour, Conley almost jumped out of his skin when the engine started.

Mrs. Conley screamed and wrung her hands, thinking her husband had been blown up; half a dozen of the smaller children fell off the fence with fright, and the rest climbed down with more haste than politeness and scampered to a safe distance; the grinning neighbors ducked their heads and threw up their elbows, and one family two blocks down the street sent word to stop the noise, as one of the family was dangerously ill, and it was feared the continued racket might prove fatal.

Jack was the first to recover his composure, and emerged from the smoke, which almost enveloped the machine, with a smile of triumph on his perspiring countenance.

To get to the street it was necessary to back the machine out from under the shed and turn it around in the yard. Conley climbed into the seat with great confidence and tried it. The first thing he did was to go forward instead of reverse, with the result that he knocked a board off the back side of the shed and killed the engine. This necessitated another

cranking operation in a cramped space between the front of the machine and the back of the shed. This culminated in another explosion with the accompanying cloud of smoke.

Jack climbed fearlessly into the machine again, and this time backed in earnest and nearly ran over his wife, who screamed and fled up the back steps. He brought his juggernaut to a stop three inches from the back of the house and congratulated himself that he had killed neither his engine nor his wife. He wouldn't have minded if he had killed a few of the yelling hoodlums and neighbors, who kept getting more and more numerous. Their sarcastic remarks would have driven him to madness if he could have heard them above the din of his motor.

His next proceeding to turn round was to go forward on the low speed. This he would have accomplished without accident if it hadn't been for a hitherto unnoticed clothes-line stretched across the back yard. This clothes-line caught Jack just under the chin as he was going forward, and would have dragged him from his seat with perhaps serious consequences if he had not hurriedly applied the emergency-brake, thereby stopping the engine.

Then followed another series of crankings, culminating in the usual way, and Jack climbed back in the seat after taking down the clothes-line and started forward.

He became slightly mixed on the different foot-pedals, however, and before he could stop crashed into the fence, ripping off several boards and breaking off a post near the ground; also bending his fenders and putting a big dent in the radiator. He was somewhat compensated, however, by the scare he gave the spectators who were lined up back of the fence.

Quickly reversing, he shot back across the yard toward the opposite fence. The audience on this side did not wait for the crash, but, profiting by the narrow escape of those on the other side, fled in all directions when they saw him coming their way.

Jack did not lose control of the machine this time, but the yard was so full of smoke that he did not see the fence until too late, and bumped into it with considerable force. He did no damage, but he took no chances and shut down his engine.

By this time the engine was warmed up so it took but little cranking to start it, and after two careful manœuvers the machine was headed toward the street. It was dark by this time, and they decided to light the lamps, but couldn't find any.

They found the place where they ought to be, but there were unmistakable evidences that they had been taken off. Jack couldn't remember whether the lamps were on when he bought it or not, but finally concluded they were not.

There was an oil lamp on each side of the dash, but an investigation proved there was no oil in them. It was out of the question to go out after dark without lights, so they decided to postpone their first ride until the following evening.

Accordingly Jack cranked up the machine and backed it under the shed, but in doing so he knocked out one of the props, with the result that the flimsy roof crashed down on him and the automobile just as they came to a stop. Mrs. Conley screamed for the eleventh time that night, and hurried to the wreck, but Jack crawled sheepishly out from under the débris unhurt. The light roof had not damaged the automobile, but it was too late and too dark to raise it then, so it was left as it was until morning.

Anybody with the cash in hand could have bought a "used car" exceedingly cheap that night.

Jack put in an hour's hard work the next morning before breakfast literally raising the roof. He managed to prop it up so he could get out and take a ride after work without delay.

Before noon Mrs. Conley called him on the telephone at the office. A friend who knew something about automobiles had been at the house and she had taken him out to inspect their recent purchase.

"There isn't any tail lamp either," she told Jack over the telephone, "and we can't be out after dark without that and a set of lamps and a Prestolite tank for the front."

"Then I'll buy some to-day," was the reply. "You know we got a big bargain and can afford to buy some extras," he added cheerfully.

"And there's no speedometer," continued Mrs. Conley, "And we can't tell how fast we are going and whether we are breaking the speed limit or not without a speedometer."

"Well, speedometers don't cost so very much; we'll have one."

"And there aren't any tools—not even a wrench; I looked under the back seat and it is empty."

"All right, I'll get a wrench and anything else we need."

"There isn't any pump, either, to pump up our tires; we surely ought to have a pump."

"I'll buy a pump on the way home to-night."

"We ought to have two extra tubes in case we get a puncture. The front and rear tires are different sizes, so we will have to have two to provide for emergencies."

"Say," shouted Jack in exasperation, "this is getting pretty near the limit, but if we've got to have those things, you know there is a hundred dollars left in the bank and we can get them all right."

Mrs. Conley was going to suggest that they have the seat reupholstered and the machine painted some other color than red, but she wisely reserved these requests until some later date.

That evening the initial ride was indefinitely postponed. The following day a garage man came to the Conley home and took away a big red vehicle from the back yard. Conley stopped at the garage man's place of business that same day on the way home from work and that gentleman told him he would put on all the equipment which the Conleys had specified, including a few necessities they hadn't thought of, and one new tire to replace one that was worn out, for eighty-five dollars. He also said there was a rattle in the transmission, which he thought he could fix for about fifteen dollars; and he said if the valves were ground and the engine properly oiled, it would run much smoother. This, he estimated, would cost ten dollars additional.

Conley went home and thought it over, and after discussing it with his wife, the garage man was ordered to go ahead with the work the next day, even though it would be necessary to draw out all the bank account and borrow ten dollars besides.

"Did you have a mechanic along when you bought this old boat?" the garage man had inquired of Conley.

Conley admitted he did not.

"Oh, then you bought it 'sight unseen?'" queried the repairer.

"It's worth three hundred dollars, isn't it?" returned Conley, a little puzzled by the other's questions.

The garage man possessed considerable tact as well as mechanical ability, so he said nothing.

The work was completed and the machine returned to the Conley back yard on Friday afternon. Conley begged a holiday from the head bookkeeper on Saturday in contemplation of a long tour, though he was compelled to work late Friday night to partly make up for it.

The Conley steam-roller — as the neighbors had named it — roused the community shortly after sunrise Saturday morning. Unhampered by the presence and remarks of critical neighbors, Jack had better luck with the machine than he had Monday night.

After bending one fender, scraping the paint off a pergola post, running over one rose-bush and destroying a young fruit-tree, the machine, with

Conley and his wife in the seat, bounced over the gutter into the public highway, and the last the curious neighbors ever saw of it was a vague red shape thumping merrily down the street in a cloud of dust and smoke.

"It runs lots better since we got it fixed," shouted Conley in his wife's ear.

"Yes, love," she yelled back, "it doesn't make nearly as much noise; it goes just fine."

On they rattled through the warm morning sunshine, picking out the best roads and boulevards, as happy and care free as two March hares. They left the city streets behind and rolled and bounced over the country roads.

They failed to notice a warning sign by the road which read as follows:

NOTICE TO AUTOISTS

Coleville City Limits

SPEED LIMIT 8 MILES

Look Out for the Cop

On past the sign they rumbled, the new speedometer vacillating from twelve to eighteen miles an hour. The houses began to be more numerous, with now and then a small shop.

A man in uniform ran out from a small store and shouted for them to stop, then jumped on a motorcycle and started in pursuit. Jack was too busy guiding the machine to pay any attention, but Mrs. Conley noticed the man and it dawned on her that they were being pursued by a motorcycle officer.

She shouted this information into Jack's ear, and the latter took a firm grip on the steering-wheel and turned round to look behind. Through the haze of smoke he could see the man in uniform just getting under way on his motorcycle and motioning for him to stop.

It is to Jack's credit that he had no intention of violating the law. He firmly intended to stop in obedience to the summons. But in twisting round to look backward, his left foot slipped off the clutch, and being unaccustomed to locating the different pedals by feeling alone, he tramped vigorously on the foot throttle when he turned back.

Under the unaccustomed influx of gasoline, the old machine coughed and sputtered and rumbled and tore ahead as if bent on instant destruction.

Jack was frightened, but thinking his foot was still on the clutch, he shoved vigorously to throw it out, but only fed more gasoline into the panting motor. The smoke rolled up through the floor of the auto so thick that Jack could hardly see the foot-pedals when he glanced down. He couldn't look carefully, because he was so busy steering clear of obstacles in the street.

Meantime, above the din of his own machine, he could hear the sharp *pop-pop-pop* of the motorcycle close behind. Finally, in his confusion and desperation, Conley reached down with his hand and set the emergency brake.

The machine stopped within twenty feet, throwing Mrs. Conley on her knees in the bottom of the auto. As for Conley, the stop was so sudden that it threw him into the steering-wheel, which caught him in the stomach and knocked the wind out of him.

The officer was about the most astonished individual of the trio. He was coming close behind at the rate of sixty miles an hour, and had barely time to set the brakes on his motorcycle before he crashed into the Conley automobile, bending his front forks and throwing himself to the street.

He was unhurt, however, and jumped up at once, but not in a very amiable frame of mind.

"Trying to run away from me, wasn't you?" he demanded.

"No—I—wasn't," gasped Conley, who was just getting his breath back.

Protests were unavailing, and Conley was compelled to crank up his ma-

chine, and with the officer standing on the running-board and leading his crippled motorcycle alongside, they made their way to the office of the justice of the peace about two blocks farther up the street.

They had to wait nearly an hour for the justice of the peace to arrive, and all Conley's efforts to placate the indignant officer were in vain. The latter insisted that Conley, seeing that he could not outspeed the motorcycle, had stopped with the deliberate intention of wrecking the officer's machine.

When the justice of the peace finally arrived, he sided with the officer, and fined Jack thirty-five dollars. He made it plain that the usual fine for speeding was twenty-five dollars, and that the extra ten dollars was added to cover the damages to the officer's feelings and motorcycle.

The Conleys, of course, didn't have the money, so the court kept the automobile as security and permitted the owner to go in search of the funds to pay the fine.

Jack and his wife caught an interurban car for the city, and Mrs. Conley, having had enough excitement for one day, went home, while Jack called at the office of his uncle and negotiated a loan. He then hurried back to Coleville and paid his fine.

As he emerged from the courtroom he noticed a big man looking curiously at his automobile which stood near the curb.

"Is that your automobile?" asked the big man as Jack came up.

Jack said it was.

"Where did you get it?"

Jack was a little ruffled, and demanded why he wanted to know. The big man threw back his coat and showed a city detective's star.

"That answers the description of a machine that was stolen in Plainfield a couple of weeks ago," said the detective, "and you will have to explain to the chief how you came by it."

The big detective proved as obdurate as the village motorcycle officer, and Conley was forced to drive with him back to the city and up to the police-station. Here they produced a printed description of the machine, and after the automobile expert of the police department had crawled about under Conley's machine and examined the factory numbers on the body and on the engine, he identified it absolutely as the one stolen at Plainfield.

Jack was taken into the captain's office and questioned about the ownership of the machine, and how he acquired it. He had little difficulty in proving his innocence, but when he described the man from whom he bought it, the detectives looked knowingly at each other.

"He's the slickest automobile thief in the country," one of them informed Jack. "We've been looking for him for a year, but have never been able to catch him."

It might have been supposed that Jack would have been utterly downcast at this turn of events. Instead, he had been under such a strain that it was a positive relief to turn the automobile over to the police to be returned to the rightful owner, and Jack walked home with a lighter heart than he had borne all that week.

Mrs. Conley wept a little, but felt better after that, and taking the situation philosophically, began to devise some explanation to make to the neighbors respecting the disappearance of the machine.

Jack told a more or less plausible story at the office the next Monday about receiving such a good offer for his car that he couldn't turn it down.

"You can't always clean up a couple of hundred as easy as that," he concluded.

The Conleys are nearly out of debt again, and are practically back to a normal mode of existence.

When they say "car" now they refer, not to a gasoline-propelled bunch of trouble, but to one of the yellow vehicles the traction company operates on a track at five cents per ride.

The Promotion of Pat O'Day

By Donald Francis McGrew

IN the words of Sergeant "Hocky" Grogan of L troop,—himself, per his own description, a "military bachelor with fists at the end of his arms"—Lieutenant Patrick O'Day was "a man of consequence and a florid complexion, besides being the owner of a brogue you c'u'd cut with a shovel."

This was true. O'Day was an educated man, but the brogue of his forefathers clung to his tongue like fur; and, in addition to this, he was one of those rare products of Erin, an Irishman with little sense of humor.

On the day he was assigned to the ——th Cavalry at Monterey, California, one Blackey O'Hearn, a bow-legged son of Cherry Hill, New York, and a private in L troop withal, was "walking number one," the post in front of the guard-house. Lieutenant O'Day had been detailed as officer of the day.

His reputation had come on ahead of him; and as O'Hearn saw him coming across the parade, he "came down to port arms." But, instead of employing the usual call, O'Hearn threw out his chest and bawled: "Toin out de g'ard—Pat O'Day!"

The rest of the guard choked and disappeared within doors; and Patrick came stalking across the parade with one gimlet eye fixed on O'Hearn.

"Pwhat's that you s'id?" he demanded of O'Hearn.

"When was that, sir?" asked the imperturbable Blackey.

"Ye know whin, me foine Bowery bantam!"

"Well, sir, if you means just now, sir, I sez: 'Toin out de g'ard, off'cer de day!'"

"And so you did, and so you did! But ye have a foine ilimintal twist to your enunciation. Sargint, whin this mon comes off post, do ye give him wan hour's instrookshun in rhudimenthary English!"

This story was related with much gusto and many trimmings by the ribald members of L troop. But the next day their chuckles were met coming up with a curse, for Captain Duncan, their troop commander, was ordered to Fort Riley on special duty, and O'Day to take his place.

"Fine for the captain!" growled First Sergeant Grogan. "But what do we get?"

The question was soon answered.

At the very first drill, L troop found that it had a new troop commander.

"Draw — saber!" commanded O'Day—and they drew. "Right—cut!" said O'Day—and they cut. "Howld on!" said O'Day; then: "Now, there's two men in this throop not payin' attintion. I won't mintion anny names, but you Meyers, and you, O'Hearn, if yez don't wake up, I have a rope round yer nicks that I'll be pullin' up wid a jerk!"

Some one snickered and went to the guard-house, and then, as L troop put it, "Patrick dear lit in and drilled that outfit from hell to breakfast."

This in itself might have been endured by L troop's seasoned troopers; but the new troop commander "began to get notions about making savings off the troop mess fund." The troop had just returned from Cuba, and was due for the Philippines; it was made up of men with three or four enlistments who were about to be discharged and had figured on "taking on" again under Captain Duncan; now, however, they began to leave and go to other troops as fast as they received their "buzzards." You may economize on rations "in the middle of a hitch," but you must feed Sammy Files near the end of his enlistment.

Consequently, many recruits came pouring in to fill L troop's depleted ranks. But they did not tarry long. Lieutenant O'Day's pet prescription for recruits turned out to be eight hours' bareback drill at the trot, which is an exceptionally fine formula for making a milk shake of your interior.

After painfully stripping their trousers from their lacerated legs, most of the recruits departed for regions unknown, while those who tarried "shoved up" the deserters' blankets for beer at the Blue Front, and "agitated" murder or wholesale mutiny.

"I'll be pulling my freight myself soon," grumbled the usually good-natured O'Hearn.

Grogan turned on him a pair of eyes that could assume at will the outraged expression of an indignant hen. They were sympathetic enough now.

"Patience, Romeo," he soothed. "The old man'll be back one of these days. If I did not think so, do you think I'd stay up the pole?"

"I know. But I ain't had a square feed for a mont'. And drill? Dere won't be a leg left on a hoss soon. And what'll we get in de islands? We'll be going over dere wit' de woist mob of ham-backed bums in de woild, and only half a troop at dat."

"Well, I'll have a word with Patrick dear," Grogan decided. And he did.

"Lieutenant," said he, "perhaps if we let up a little on these rookies, we could get some of them to stay."

"Sargint," said Patrick, "do ye let me command this throop. Ye are not up on psychol'gy. Have ye iver seen callouses come on the hand be wiping them with a handkerchief? For a throop to come up to the scratch, give me a throop that has been gone over with a curry-comb. Them is the lads will ketch the bullets bechune their teeth. It takes the harrow to rake out the weeds, sargint, and begad I am that harrow!"

Said O'Hearn when he heard this, "Aw, let's transfer Hocky. Youse can be made top cutter in some other layout."

"It's not having to transfer as a private I'm thinking of," the old Indian fighter pointed out, straightening to the full height of his six feet. "Didn't I help make this troop one of the best? Well! Am I to back down and let this Mick put the troop on the fritz? I will get a troop to the islands or bust myself doing it."

Thereupon O'Hearn subsided; and Grogan waxed his fierce tawny mustache and went at his work with fresh ardor. The bigger part of it was not laid down in any guide book. In addition to the ordinary office work, he was wet nurse, diplomat, and father confessor all rolled in one, doing his best at night to place salve on the spots Patrick had knocked off with "his curry-comb of a tongue" in the day-

time. Hero of many glorious debauches, this man still had a pride in the things that were kneaded into his spine, and he worked with his troop as men work with things that are supposed to be more valuable.

"Patrick is right—in a way," he said to O'Hearn. "Rough toweling is the thing for this, which ain't no ladies' game. Only, you've got to know *when*. Its no use toweling a man when he ain't wet."

So, with perseverance, and in spite of Patrick, Grogan eventually landed a troop in Manila.

"The backs of some of them necks never saw the sun before the troop barber got at them, but there's nearly a full troop of men in uniform, anyway," he thought as they trotted out to drill before the inspector general. "If the old man don't come back, maybe we'll get into a mix-up so Patrick dear'll get a chance of promotion."

Vain hope! Before the drill was half over the general stopped it and sent L troop to garrison San Marco, a sleepy little barrio where cobwebs had grown on the wings of the dove of peace.

"Look now!" roared O'Day, raging before the troop. "Bekaze nature forgot ye whin she was dishin' out brains, ye bawl up all the movemints av rhudimenthary dhrill. And here we stick while all av the other throops is chasin' gu-gus all over the shop. Look at K throop now, gettin' all the fillin' av the pie, chasin' Loocan over round Quatre de José! Yez are a disghrace, but if it's dhrill ye need, begad I'll be givin' it to yez!"

"D'y' know what he needs?" gritted O'Hearn when they returned from a drill lasting seven hours. "He needs a dum-dum bullet in de back!"

"None of that?" snapped Grogan.

The quarters of the troop were in a deserted church, and he nodded toward the interior, where many angry voices could be heard explaining some unprintable views about the army in general, and Pat O'Day in particular.

"If you and the rest of the old fellows talk that way, we'll have mutiny here."

"Anything for a change!" grumbled the black head. "What's eatin' that guy; I bet you, he's nutty for another bar on his shoulder straps. Wish to God Caloocan would come round dis way and give us a chance."

"I don't know that he will," said Hocky. "Looks to me like these *hombres* here meant to keep the oath of allegiance they took. Caloocan can't get no supplies from here, so we ain't going to see him. But buck up. Something 'll happen. It can't rain all the time."

But O'Hearn remained pessimistic, and talked "moider and desoition."

As the days passed, it "got hopelesser and hopelesser." Captain Kullom of K troop, over at Quatre de José, was promoted for capturing a Filipino *teniente* named Rodero, and this did not help matters. In order to prevent possible surprise and the smuggling of supplies to the Filipino guerrillas, a cordon of outposts was strung around the barrio, which took nearly half the troop each night, giving the men but "one night in"; coupled with this, they were drilled six hours each morning, and in the afternoons set to "policing up" bananna skins thrown about the market place by the natives. From four to six they rested —while grooming their horses.

"If another one of them gu-gus laugh at me while I'm doing their dirty work," stormed O'Hearn, "I'll blow off his damned bean. A little more o' did, and I'll go down to Hop. Toy's canteen, an' fill up on bino, an' take dis boig to pieces to see what makes it woik."

This embodied the attitude of the whole troop. Even Grogan, the reliable, had given up hope; and the next day an incident occurred that broke the camel's back.

The troop was at drill, and Patrick gave the command to "fight on foot." At this command, numbers one, two,

and three of each set of fours dismount with their rifles and canteens, while number four remains mounted to lead away the horses. Horses number one and two are linked together, and the reins of number three handed to trooper number four. Without further orders, the non-commissioned officer carrying the guidon usually takes command of the led horses; on this occasion Patrick took them himself.

"I'll give yez some instrookshuns the non-commissioned officers do not seem to circumlocute," said he. "Forward! March!"

The column started—and Blackey O'Hearn was in the lead. "Trot! Ho!" said Patrick—and they trotted. "Gallop! Ho!" said Patrick—and they galloped.

Then, as Patrick said nothing more, O'Hearn set sail on a bee-line for the horizon, and ran square into a mango tree. The linked horses wrapped themselves round that tree like so many sling-shots.

"Well, what the ——!" gagged Patrick. "Have yez gone crazy?"

"I heard no command, 'Column right,' sir," said O'Hearn.

"You heard no—oh, by the—"

Here Patrick grew apoplectic, and what he said then was both awful and sublime. He kept the troop out without dinner until three that afternoon, and groomed until seven that night.

"Which is enough," said Grogan. "Come, Blackey. Lead me away to where the woodvine twineth, and we'll liquidate."

And O'Hearn and a half dozen more fell on their first sergeant's neck and went away.

They sojourned first in Hop Toy's canteen. Hop Toy was a sleek Celestial who dispensed wet goods with a smile and a ready hand providing one had the wherewithal. On this night he was absent, but no one cared especially, as his goods retained the same desired "kick" when handed out by his native clerk.

The clerk, however, was penurious. He refused the rollicking United States citizens credit when they were no longer able to "divvy up the pesos." So Chief Hocky and his buccaneers chucked him into the brine barrel and fell away with the honors of war and an undiminished thirst that carried them out into the night and away toward the tuba grove.

Whatever else may be said of our island possessions, let it be known that there the liquor grows on the trees, a fact which our buccaneers came fully to appreciate. A twig of a coconut tree is cut, and the sap allowed to run into a bamboo bucket and ferment; and the natives call it tuba, and pray to the gods for mercy whenever the Americans partake thereof. It was in search of this sublime concoction that Mr. Grogan, O'Hearn, *et al.*, set out through the pitchy blackness.

In all innocence, then, they were pushing their way through the high cogon-grass near the grove, when one of the men gave a startled yell. The next instant found them in the midst of several ponies loaded with rifles and ammunition; and two seconds later three Filipino gentlemen and one Chinese subject were beating the ground with their faces. The soldiers assisted them.

"Strike a match!" grunted Hocky. "My man here has the St. Vitus dance. Lay still, or I'll tattoo your sky-piece with Mr. Colt's autograph."

The match was struck, and some papers brought to view—and the soldiers nearly collapsed. It was El Capitan Loocan!

"Hop Toy, too!" exulted one. "By George, we'll take 'em in. We're made men."

"We will not!" said Grogan. "Not until I think." And he thought.

"Men," he grinned at last, "what would you rather do or be rid of Pat O'Day?"

"You're full as a goat," gasped O'Hearn. "What d' ye mean?"

"Watch. Hop Toy—do you know what you'll get out of this? You took the oath. Twenty years in Bilibid, and all your goods confiscated."

Hop Toy wailed.

"Aha!" Grogan ejaculated. "You want to get out of it, eh? Well, I guess you'll do your part."

Then Grogan turned his attention to El Capitan Loocan. It took diplomacy and a touch of the water cure, but in the end they had a letter from El Capitan Loocan to his *teniente,* Cordilios, to wit; on the second afternoon thereafter he, Cordilios, would approach and attack the barrio San Marco. Capitan Loocan had positive information that on that day all the Americanos save the guard would be off on a practise march. Because his presence was needed to bolster them, he, Loocan, would stay in San Marco to head the uprising of the people. He was therefore sending on Hop Toy with the message and the guns.

"We'll have to let the rifles go through," said Grogan. "Otherwise they might smell a rat. And remember, not one word where Patrick dear is liable to hear it," he concluded, as they tied up the three Filipinos with bohuka twine and led them to the safety of an old wine-press. "O'Hearn and Joyce, you stay with them. I'll report you present."

The nearest outpost was then taken into the scheme, and Hop Toy sent through with the ponies.

Then the hilarious pirates returned to the barracks to instruct the rest of the troop in the art of promoting officers.

"Hold on!" admonished Grogan, when the jubilant troop showed signs of celebrating prematurely. "Don't be drinking yourselves into the mill by platoons. It's up to you to keep a tight lid, and drill. Drill, by Jupiter, like you was all left-hand men to Louey Napoleon. Otherwise you're liable to be caught pickin' weeds under the *padre's* porch with no guns to hand when the parade commences."

The troop listened, and stiffened with a thrum like that of a vibrating, well-tempered blade. The evolutions they went through during the next two days would have passed for the movements of the Queen's Own Guards.

Said Patrick after drill that second day—and the man was actually smiling—"Sargint, that was foine! There'll be no need of fatigue this afternoon. Do you let the boys get in a little *bunk* fatigue."

And he winked his eye and started off to his quarters.

"Bunk fatigue, is it?" grinned Grogan. "They're not thinking of bunk fatigue now," with a smile at the excited recruits.

The men were dumming bullets, picking up their cartridge-belts at every sound they heard, running eagerly to the windows to peer out, and spilling their cigarette "makings" all over the place.

"Be quiet, or you'll give it all away," said Grogan. "And here you and you"—choosing some of the coolest—"you slip out and take positions round some of the gu-gu shacks. Mind you keep out of Patrick's sight getting there, too. And the minute you hear any shooting out at the outposts, you open up into the air. That's to give Cordilios the idea the town has risen, too."

The men started out as ordered, while Grogan held a fatherly hand over the recruits. As it was, he felt in no danger of freezing himself, since any number of things might have cropped out to spoil the ruse. He felt reasonably sure, however, that Hop Toy would go through, for the Chinaman's property was in jeopardy, and John is a thrifty man.

So they waited, and waited—and then—here they came.

Away out in the coco-palms the guns sounded—*crackety, crackety, pop, pop, pop.*

"Fall in!" yelled Grogan, as the men scattered over town opened up

into the air. The troop tramped on one another's toes getting into line, while the shots of the retreating outposts came rapidly nearer; and from his quarters Patrick came charging, buckling on his saber as he ran.

"Call off!" snapped Grogan—and they called off like the rattle of a stick along a picket fence.

"Count fours!" said Grogan—and it was like the barking of Gatling guns. And there was Patrick.

"The troop is formed, sir," said Grogan, all in one breath. One might have lit cigars off Patrick's eyes.

"Thin forward and at thim!" he yelled—and the troop "double-timed" out across the plaza and "lit into" the oncoming Filipinos with the crash of a lashing tidal wave.

Did rough toweling prove equal to the situation that day? Ask any one who saw it.

"Fire at will for the flag and the divil!" yelled Pat O'Day.

The troop open ordered and danced down the side streets, playing the Elbow Rag on their gun bolts as they went. That is a splendid tune when rendered with a Paderewski frenzy by a horde of recruits whose hair stands brindle stiff on the backs of their necks. Patrick had cause to think well of his theories that day.

"For County Mayo and the shamrock!" he howled. "Come on, ye pirates!"—and the popping of the bamboo, and the women screeching behind the windows, and the roaring of the Krags between the houses were sounds to hear.

Near the fag end of it, when the surprised and even horrified Filipinos were bounding about like so many monkeys caught in a burning cage, O'Hearn came onto the scene with El Capitan Loocan. Between grunts he wielded his boot with excellent precision.

Then the frantic Loocan, seeing Lieutenant O'Day, broke loose and ran to prostrate himself at the Irishman's feet. But on the way he inconsiderately thrust his head in the way of a lead pellet bound for Borneo, and where the head was, behold there was no head.

"Which is a good t'ing dat rookie was aimin' at the sun," panted O'Hearn. "Or maybe dere'd been some queer tales told to Patrick darling this day."

But "Patrick darling" had not noticed. He was busily engaged with a gentleman from San Fernando. The gentleman from San Fernando was protesting vigorously against being used as a saber scabbard, but Patrick had him against a bamboo fence, and so held a voting majority.

In the mean time Grogan was calling off for the quadrille out near the outskirts; and when he came on Patrick again, that worthy was sitting down on the edge of a rice dike, easing his pumping lungs.

"Do you think any of thim got away, sargint?" he panted, looking back at the streets, where the white-shirted Filipinos were piled in windrows.

Grogan looked away toward the groves. There the men with the best "wind" were still playing the encore. "Not unless they had wings, sir," said Grogan.

"Well," grinned Patrick, "there's more than wan av thim gu-gus will have wings in a warmer clime the night. And wings wished onto them by the proper study av theories and military psychol'gy!"

Grogan "kept his face at parade rest," for he knew what he knew; and he left his troop commander to round up those men who had gone head drunk with the fighting.

When that done, and all the prisoners assembled, there followed an impromptu court of inquiry conducted by one Patrick O'Day. There are no official records to be had of that inquiry.

Cordilios and Loocan were *hors de combat*, but the prisoners had some pointed questions to ask of the town's people who did not join in as expected.

Patrick also wanted to know who did the shooting within the town precincts when the firing broke out on the outskirts; and now and then he looked at his first sergeant "with a twist to the tail av his eye."

But Hop Toy was silent; he departed that night with all his portable shekels; and in the end, seeing a captaincy looming up on the rainbow of the future, Patrick looked at Grogan and said:

"Sargint, mayhap ye are a mon av theories yerself—though I wud not guess ut to look at ye. I am riccomindin' ye to a certificate av merit. And—" He looked at the troop and scratched his head—

"Well—" and Grogan thought that he was on the point of buying ten barrels of beer and giving them all a two days' pass— "Well, sargint," he said, "ye can tell the mess sargint he can spind two dollars extra to-night for butter. Shure the bhoys need some reward!"

Save for the narration of Pat O'Day's promotion, which took place of course, that should be the logical point of completion for this story. But there is many a slip 'twixt—the writing and the selling of a story.

L troop and Hocky Grogan ate the butter and drank the health of some four hundred queens in succession up to and half-way through the day of promotion; but nine days after the order was read, a weary squad found a very much absent Grogan on the roof of a gu-gu shack.

He was bedecked with flowers and a Jap kimono, and telling the world what he thought of theories in particular and a fellow named Sy Cology in general; for the order came back reading something like this:

> Order Number 982. First Lieutenant Patrick O'Day, U. S. Cavalry, promoted to rank of captain, U. S. Cavalry, will retain command of L troop, ——th Cavalry, superseding Captain Warren Duncan, transferred to Signal Corps, per Order 981.

TO MEADOWS.

YE have been fresh and green,
  Ye have been fill'd with flowers,
And ye the walks have been
  Where maids have spent their hours.

You have beheld how they
  With wicker arks did come
To kiss and bear away
  The richer cowslips home.

You've heard them sweetly sing,
  And seen them in a round:
Each virgin like a spring,
  With honeysuckles crown'd.

But now we see none here
  Whose silv'ry feet did tread,
And with dishevel'd hair
  Adorn'd this smoother mead.

Life unthrifts, having spent
  Your stock and needy grown,
You're left here to lament
  Your poor estates, alone.

Robert Herrick.

Enter Mary O'Neil

By W. H. Sperry

COLONEL BEVERLY CUTTS stroked his mustache and smiled faintly. He sat on the porch of the hacienda at Bar C Ranch at Carson Sink, Nevada, and on the ground below him were ranged his son and four cow-punchers.

The subject of discussion was the new cook.

Henry Swanson, for two years the supreme and uncontested ruler of the Bar C kitchen, had awakened in the night the week previous with the dread premonition that the orbit of his Seattle wife would shortly cross that of his Oakland spouse.

Henry, fearing that the resulting interstellar disturbance would cause observation and inquiry, had departed, leaving no address. The Bar C was a pleasant berth and all that a humble preparer of the baked meats could ask for, but district attorneys and the police can be so rudely inquisitive.

Colonel Cutts had ordered a new cook from a Reno employment agency, but in the hurry of the moment had neglected to specify a sex, with the result that the sacred precincts of the hacienda Bar C had been invaded by the feminine but substantial foot of Mrs. Mary O'Neil.

"The colonel's making a mistake keeping her," commented Dry Wash Wilson, as he explored his pockets for a cigarette paper. "Cook's supposed to cut the wood and do a raft of other things round a cattle outfit, but this bird ain't going to do it none whatever."

"You bet she ain't," added Shorty McCabe, successor to Buck Simms, who with a newly won bride had lately gone to the Cutts Walker River Ranch to assume the foremanship. "She comes out of the kitchen this morning and grabs me by the ear, and drags me over to the woodpile, and tells me to cut some wood. I ain't a-goin' to argue with no woman, specially when she's got a twist on my ear, but I ain't a goin' to cut no more."

"Yes," supplemented Dry Wash. "And when sitting on the kitchen-steps this morning, mending a cinch, she orders me to come in and clean the ashes outen her stove, and be blamed quick about it."

"Did you do it?" queried Alf Johnson, recently arrived at the ranch to take the place made vacant by Pigeye Lamont, who had endeavored to set aside a love affair foreordained by fate, and had shortly thereafterward vanished to unknown but presumably safer regions.

"Sure I did it," replied Dry Wash. "She had a pan of scummy looking dish-water in her hand, and when I take my bath, I ain't aiming to have the water cluttered up with the drowned remains of the breakfast vittles."

"Trouble is with you *hombres*," observed Highlonesome Kelly, the foreman, "you don't know how to deal with females. You got to treat them gentle but firm. You got to show them that you are the boss, and that when you say a thing, they can bet their last blue chip that it goes. Otherwise they ain't got no respect for you at all."

"Id like to see this oyster betting on any such proposition," said Dry Wash. "She'd slop you across the face with a wet dish-towel by way of showing her everlasting respect."

"That's on account of your almighty ignorance," Highlonesome informed him. "The women folks is an inferior sect and they knows it, and if you shows them that they can't run no bluff on you, they ca'ms down and does what you tells them to."

"Huh," grunted Shorty, "I'd like to see you expoundin' them principles, when a she-giant has you by the ear."

"They ain't going to be no woman grabbing me by the ear," Highlonesome retorted severely.

The discussion was ended by Mrs. O'Neil appearing from the rear of the house.

"Say," she called, "can't one of you lazy loafers go out and ketch one of them cows and get me some fresh milk? I declare I can't make no cake with this canned stuff."

"No, ma'am," answered Highlonesome, suavely. "Them animals ain't trained for milking, and wouldn't stand for it none whatever."

"I suppose you call yourself a man," she berated, "you long-geared, gangling piece of a busted fence-rail, if you had half the nerve of a sore tooth, you'd go out there and get me some milk."

Highlonesome flushed under this painfully accurate description of himself, and Dry Wash, who had conjured up a sudden vision of the lean and lengthy foreman trying to extract the lacteal fluid from a madly galloping longhorn, while her festive hind hoofs played a tattoo against his ribs, rolled on the ground in helpless mirth.

"And as for you, you sandy-whiskered little runt," she continued, "if you don't stop laughing mighty blamed quick, I'll come down there and give you something to laugh about."

Dry Wash subsided and Highlonesome, feeling that the eyes of all assembled were looking to him to live up to the lofty views expressed but a few moments before, rose to the occasion to deliver a stinging rebuke.

"Madam," he proclaimed, "a woman's spear is in her household. Man does not interfere with you, as long as you remain within your proper domain, but when you wander outside of your realm and seek to usurp the perogatives of man, we must call you to account."

Mrs. O'Neil placed her hands on her hips, and viewed the speaker with infinite scorn and contempt.

"Huh," she gibed, "you must 'a' been reading the speeches of Daniel Webster. Ain't you got some more of that, or is it all you learned this time? And now lemme tell you something, you insignificant imitation of a two-legged he-animal.

"The next time you come snooping round my domain, I'm going to spear you with about a foot and a half of basting fork. And you little sawed-off cross between a nearsighted billy-goat and a Mexican hairless dog, quit your blinking at me, and go bring me in an armful of wood.

"Ain't a goin' to pack no wood," declared Shorty, feeling himself to be the one addressed in this bit of flowery and pedigree describing eloquence.

"Oh, you ain't, ain't you," said Mrs. O'Neil, starting toward him. "We'll see about that."

Shorty got up and went over to the

woodpile, where he sullenly proceeded to pile up an armload of wood.

"She didn't seem to be treating your firm and gentle words with no more respect than was necessary," observed Dry Wash.

"You wait," advised Highlonesome, "I'll get her trained so she will come up and eat out of my hand."

"She ain't a goin' to eat out of no hand of mine," declared Alf Johnson emphatically. "From what I've seed of her, it's about a ten to one bet that she'd bite your thumb off."

In the days that followed, cowpunchers learned to become fleet and nimble at fetching wood, drawing water, and otherwise acting as handmaidens to the queen of the Bar C.

Meetings called to order to pass resolutions protesting against this practise, were abruptly ended by some member having to depart to hang out the washing, and meetings called in the evenings to discuss the serious question of a general strike, had to be called off because of a lack of full attendance. Some member would be compelled to send regrets, greatly deploring the necessity of spending the evening washing dishes.

Highlonesome alone refused to succumb to the blandishing attractions of these weakening feminine diversions, and for that reason, Mrs. O'Neil canceled all game laws and declared a continual open season on him. He gave the kitchen a wide berth as a place lacking in the safety requisite to longevity, and ate his meals with an alert and wary eye.

"Hey, you," she would call out to him as he sat on the corral fence lazily rolling a smoke, "you long-drawed-out section of a human bean-pole, shake your rattlesnake-shaped figger offen that fence and rustle me up a bucket of water."

"You rustle your own water, woman," he would airily reply. "I ain't doing no female chores. A woman oughta do the duties of her own domain without bothering man, and 's far 's I'm concerned, she's going to. If them other sap-headed jaspers want to run round, obeying your beck and call, I ain't got nothing to say, but Highlonesome Kelly ain't acting as no kitchen scullion."

"You missable, worthless, low-down imitation of what a man ought to be," she screeched, "if you had the sand of a scared rabbit, you would come over here and say them things to my face."

"Yes'm," returned Highlonesome tranquilly, "and then you'd get all het up and excited. I reckon I'll remain in my true spear and keep outa your kitchen."

The ranch presently had a visitor in Josh Fleming, buyer for the Universal Packing Company, with a retinue of sombrero-ed followers. Fleming stopped two days at the ranch, vehemently denying that he wanted cattle at any price, declaring that the company's stockyards were already glutted, that the growing scarcity of grass would increase shipments of beef until they could no longer be taken care of, and that with beef pouring in on cold storage from Australia and Argentina, the American stock-raiser would be very fortunate if he was able to sell any cattle at all for the next two years.

The colonel deplored this state of affairs and was glad that he had no beef to put on the market, the increase had been very small this year, he had more ground than he needed and would hold off selling for a year or two and fill up his range. After two days of mutual sympathy and perfect understanding, Mr. Fleming departed, taking with him a couple of hundred head of the Bar C's choicest steers, and leaving in their place, eight thousand dollars in beautiful green and yellow currency.

"Gee, that's some money, ain't it," gasped Dry Wash.

Business proceedings at the Bar C were an open court, free to all, and the retainers of both Colonel Cutts and Josh Fleming, had watched with in-

terest, the dickering and words of indifference and carelessness that had preceded the transaction.

"How'd you like to have it?" asked Highlonesome.

"Not me," replied Dry Wash, "I'd be scared to death somebody would stick me up, or some feemale would grab me and marry me for my money."

Colonel Cutts shook hands with the departing Fleming, gathered up his wealth and locked it in the tin cash box in his desk, pending his next trip to town.

The hacienda consisted of three rooms, Colonel Beverly's bedroom, then a long room filled with saddles, harness and impedimenta of every description, and next to this, with a door joining the two, the kitchen. The long room was used as the dining-room for everybody, and was also Colonel Cutts's office, and the lounging place of the cowpunchers, if they desired, though they usually spent the evenings in the bunk house.

Mrs. O'Neil paused in the act of emptying flour into the bread pan, and cocked an intent ear toward the other room. No one came forth from there, and yet there seemed to be a sound. Then came forth a faint, almost undefinable noise as of some one gently laying a heavy body on the floor. Mrs. O'Neil opened the connecting door and peered in. On the floor lay Randolph, Highlonesome and Dry Wash, tightly bound and trussed, and standing with his face to the wall, covered by Alf Johnson's gun, stood Colonel Cutts, with Shorty McCabe starting to pass a rope round his arms.

The movable contents of the kitchen began to travel into the dining-room with deadly accuracy and incredible velocity. Alf Johnson ducked a tea kettle full of scalding water with an air of easy aplomb, and raised his head in time to have his chin stop the meteoric flight of a rapidly moving flat-iron. Forthwith Mr. Johnson relapsed into an unconscious condition.

Shorty McCabe, in the act of hitching a rope to the colonel's arm, felt the rush of air as a hurtling projectile tore past his ear, and a large, unbreakable earthenware cup of the railroad eating-house variety impinged itself against the wall with a crash that betokened an intense propulsive force.

Wheeling round, he confronted two hundred active pounds of feminine wrath and hostility emerging from the kitchen with a two-foot butcher-knife. Shorty dropped his hand to his gun and then thought better of it.

The door being some fifteen feet away, Shorty vacated the premises by the window, taking the sash with him as he left, and was swallowed up in the inky darkness.

Colonel Cutts commenced to unwrap the hog-tied victims, and Mrs. O'Neil knelt down by the prostrate form of the faintly groaning Highlonesome, placed his head in her lap, and commanded the colonel to unloosen the foreman's bonds first. The ricochetting tea-kettle had caught Highlonesome on the third bounce and, besides abrasing one ear, had slightly scalded his forehead.

The released cattlemen got to their feet one by one, stretched their cramped limbs, and glowered at the now reviving figure of the hold-up man. They presently bore him away to languish in durance vile—durance vile being the grain-bin, with the armed and militant Dry Wash guarding the outside. Mrs. O'Neil detained Highlonesome and prevented him from joining the parade that escorted Alf to the cuartel.

"You come into the kitchen and lemme put some white of egg on that burn," she ordered. "Woman's domain or no domain, you come out there and lemme tend to it."

"Shucks! A little burn ain't nothing," protested Highlonesome as Mrs. O'Neil seized him by the arm and propelled him kitchenward.

"Sit down there," she commanded, and proceeded to plaster his brow

with egg. "How's that feel? Better, hey?"

"Yes'm," answered Highlonesome.

"Now, while you're here, I want to ask you something. Ain't you ashamed of some of them remarks you've made to me since I've been working here?"

Highlonesome looked at the form that loomed above him.

"Yes'm," he replied dutifully.

"I thought you'd be. And I guess I hadn't oughta said some of the things I did. I'm sorry I said 'em."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Highlonesome magnanimously. "A woman gets kind of flustered bending over a hot stove all day, and she ain't to be blamed if she gets sort of fretful."

"Sure she does," agreed Mrs. O'Neil. "And, say, you don't think I am acting unladylike because I speak sort of sharp once in a while to this gang of overfed loafers."

"You bet I don't. You got to talk to 'em rough, or you can't get no work out of them whatever."

"I'm glad you figger it that way," smiled the mollified Mrs. O'Neil. "I was afraid you might think I was an unwomanly lady."

"No, ma'am. I got a high admiration for a woman what's got the spunk to stand up for her rights. You did something to-night that not one woman in a million would 'a' done."

"Oh!" she fluttered with pleasure. "Well, let me say this, Mr. Kelly. I don't want you to think I meant no disrespect to you if I spoke up kind of hasty to you several times. I got the highest respect for you. Maybe you noticed I ain't been grabbing you by the ear and throwing dishwater on you, like I done with them other slab-sided chunks of dog-meat."

"Yes'm," said Highlonesome, reflecting to himself that until this evening she would have had to have a fire-engine to get any dishwater on his elusive form. "I knew that you was the right kind, ma'am, and that we'd get along together fine after we got over the first shyness incidental to getting acquainted."

"Oh, do you think so!" blushed Mrs. O'Neil.

"Yes'm," said Highlonesome cheerfully. "I think you and me would hit it off together right well. What do you think about becoming Mrs. Kelly? It sounds about right to me."

"Why, Mr. Kelly," giggled Mrs. O'Neil, "this is awful unexpected. I never would 'a' thunk it."

"Don't it strike you as a pretty good idea?" persisted Highlonesome. "Here's you and me roaming round single. You and me think about the same on most things, and we'd get along together fine."

"Well, since you put it that way, I guess it would be about the right thing. But, say, I don't know how I'm ever going to call you Highlonesome. It sounds like a Chinese laundry sign. What's your real name?"

"Eustace," he answered hesitatingly.

"Eustace—Eustace," she repeated, rolling this sibilant morsel over on her tongue. "That don't sound just right, neither. I guess I'll call you Hi."

"There ain't nobody going to call me Hi," he stated indignantly. "Nor Hiram, nor Si, nor no other alfalfa-baling rube names."

"Now, you look here," she said, coming up to him with arms akimbo. "If I take it into my head to call you Hi, Hi goes; and if I want to call you Hiram, Hiram goes. Understand?"

"Yes'm," answered Highlonesome.

"All right. Now, if you're going to sit round this kitchen, you get to work and start peeling that pan of spuds for breakfast."

"Yes'm," he replied meekly; and as she disappeared into the pantry he added in an undertone: "She sure is some woman."

Colonel Cutts, sitting on the other side of a thin partition of resonant boards, remembered a certain conversation of yore and, stroking his mustache, smiled faintly.

Frogs in the "Swiss Arms"

By Frank Condon

ONE of the truisms of life is, that that which appears outwardly to be a calamity may be, in reality, the finest kind of good fortune.

A man, for instance, eating his dinner quietly in a modern restaurant, suddenly breaks the edge of a tooth. In a rage he summons the waiter, who looks and discovers that the man has bitten into a thousand-dollar pearl concealed in an oyster.

A young man, going happily to work of a sunny morning, slips on a banana-peel and performs a revolution, landing upon the back of his head, and causing an elderly gentleman in whiskers to laugh exceedingly. The young man rises in fearful wrath and starts to bawl out the elderly gentleman, who calms him, takes him home, and puts him into the will for giving him the first chuckle in thirty years.

A woman may—

But why continue with a list which might prove almost endless? To bring the subject down to brass tacks with shiny heads, take the case of Joe Runnels and Dave Wilbarger, who lived at the time in the four-story apartment-building called the Swiss Arms.

People have attempted to find out why the building was called the Swiss Arms, but always unsuccessfully. Nobody ever seemed to know, and it was finally believed that the sign-man had an oversupply of "s's" the day he started framing the name, and that, as there are four "s's" out of a possible nine letters, he decided on Swiss Arms for the sake of convenience.

At any rate, Joe Runnels and his wife lived on the top floor of the Swiss Arms, and Dave Wilbarger and his wife occupied the apartment directly across the hall; and it was well known to all the families in the building that the Runnelses and the Wilbargers were as thick as two families can well be who know a good deal about each other's intimate affairs.

Mrs. Wilbarger and Mrs. Runnels went to the theaters together and learned the tango from a pimply young man in a private dancing-school on Forty-Second Street; they criticised each other's gowns and hats with the calm shafts of frankness that go with deep friendship, and otherwise comported themselves as two loving female people who don't have to be jealous of each other.

On the other side of the family, Joe and Dave were equally pally. Any

night in the week, if you wanted to find Joe Runnels, and knew where Dave Wilbarger was, you would find Joe by going straight to Dave.

The wives kept track of their husbands through an elaborate and intricate system of cross-questions, and after a few experiences with it Joe and Dave ceased equivocating and told the precise truth on every occasion.

On a particularly hot night early in August a violent toothache had selected Joe Runnels for a victim; and, to make matters worse, Mrs. Runnels had gone to Nutley, New Jersey, in company with Mrs. Dave Wilbarger, to spend the night at Mrs. Wilbarger's mother's house. Consequently Joe was entirely alone in his flat and miserably unhappy.

He had knocked in desperation a dozen times on the Wilbarger front door, but no response came, and it was apparent that Dave Wilbarger was somewhere else. Finally when the tooth had begun jumping, and Joe was staring out of the window thinking of the same thing, Dave came up the stairs. Joe was at his door holding his head, and Dave said:

"What's the matter with you?"

"Toothache. Hurts horrible."

"Get your hat and come with me," Dave commanded, and, without another word, Joe turned back into his apartment and presently reappeared, clad for the street.

"There's only one thing in the world for a hard toothache," Dave said, leading the way to Loenstein's high-grade family café. "You fill your mouth with some of the stuff from the green bottle, tip your head to one side, and let the liquid percolate in and about the offending molar, and, zingo! the pain disappears. If that isn't so I'll eat my hat. Ed, let's have the green bottle; Mr. Runnels has a severe toothache."

"Nothing better, sir," said Ed, handing over the toothache remedy; and then the two sat down, the better to disorganize the hurtful chewer.

It is no exaggeration to state that Joe Runnel's toothache utterly disappeared within ten minutes. Joe was grateful for the relief, and as the two comrades conversed in peace and quietness the talk naturally drifted from teeth to chewing and from chewing to food and from food in general to food in particular; and with the families of Runnels and Wilbarger the particular food of all foods—the *crême de la crême* and absolutely highest pinnacle in things edible was or were—frogs' legs.

Some families have a passion for custard-pie and others prefer scrapple, while still others consume great quantities of baked beans; but with the Wilbargers and Runnelses—give them vast quantities of succulent, delicate, tender frogs' legs, and all the other dainties in the world could go hang. It was rather remarkable—the fact that four grown-up people could like the rear or propeller legs of the frog to such an amazing degree.

And when any two members of the little group began to discuss the favorite topic it was almost hopeless to expect a cessation that day. Coming up-town on the train, Dave Wilbarger had been thinking of frogs' legs, and, not having any one to talk with, he had saved up his reflections for Joe Runnels.

It might be said right here that Dave was perhaps the stronger willed of the two men. It was he who generally made decisions, formulated plans, executed schemes, devised methods, and carried out propositions. Joe ordinarily found himself in the position of willing and assistant helper in any of Dave's plans.

"There is certainly no sense," Dave was saying, "in spending the money we spend for frogs' legs, when we can see a way clear to save money and buy in quantities.

"Quite right," agreed Joe, whose tooth was now entirely quiescent.

"And again, we have bound ourselves to the habit of buying them cold,

dead and clammy from the butcher or fish-shop man. That's a mistake in itself."

"It seems so to me also," said Joe.

"How do we know?" Dave demanded, "whether we are getting fresh frogs' legs when we buy them that way? How can we tell whether they have been chopped off the frog recently or months before we buy them? How do we know they are not cold storage frogs' legs? Think of having your frogs' legs come from cold storage, where they may have reposed untold weeks and months in the presence, perhaps, of ancient beef, pork, mutton, veal, liverwurst, and other unpleasant and possibly unsanitary objects!"

"You make me shudder," Joe remarked, taking something from the green bottle against a return of the toothache and also thinking of the shudders.

"And the very worst form of infection is that caught from antiquated frogs' legs," Dave said seriously. "If you once get poisoned from eating frogs' legs that have passed their prime the only man who can do your family any good is the undertaker."

"In a minute I shall swear never to eat another one if you keep up that talk," said Joe rather morosely.

"But I have a new plan," Dave answered triumphantly. "Instead of bringing cold-storage frogs' legs into the bosoms of our respective and innocent families and submitting them to possible ptomain poisoning, we will buy our frogs' legs on the hoof, so to speak."

"What do you mean by that?" Joe demanded.

"We will buy the frogs while they are alive; then; when we want a mess of legs, we will simply amputate the desired number, broil them in the usual manner, and serve them, happy in the thought that we know they are absolutely pure and free from antiquity."

"That's the best thing you've said to me in five years," Joe said, rising to his feet and extending the right hand of congratulation to his friend. "That's a positively Homeric idea of yours. I will admit that I wouldn't have thought of such a thing in three thousand years, because my mind isn't geared up to such thoughts. But you're a genius, Dave."

You take two men and put them in immediate juxtaposition to a bottle of toothache remedy and give them something to discuss, and they will ordinarily discuss it to a mere thin shred. Joe's aching tooth had stopped; but one never knows when a toothache will return, and Dave had stated to Joe that he, too, had felt, earlier in the day, the faintest twinge of pain in a right-hand upper molar.

"The thing is," Joe said, after a moment's thought, "where do we buy the frogs, and, after we buy them, where do we keep 'em?"

Dave laughed the easy laugh of a man who never does things by halves.

"I thought the whole thing out coming up-town in the subway," he replied. "You know where Hinkle's store is, don't you?"

Joe shook his head.

"Hinkle runs a bird, animal, and reptile store around the corner on Manhattan Avenue," Dave continued, "and, naturally, he handles frogs. I know this because Hinkle and I had a talk the other day, and he told me he supplies all the big medical colleges with frogs for purposes of vivisection. We will go round there, buy our frogs, take them up to your house, and keep them for future use."

"My house?" Joe murmured questioningly.

"I would willingly have them in my house," Dave answered, "except that the fire-escape is on your side of the building, and of course they will have to be kept on the fire-escape."

"Near the kitchen window?" asked Joe.

"Certainly."

"It would be nice to surprise our wives," Joe suggested. "Seeing they

they are both away from home to-night, why not go straight ahead with this plan of yours."

"We will have to have a barrel," Dave said musingly, "and a wheelbarrow. Hinkle will sell us the frogs, all right, but he will not deliver them. We've got to do that ourselves."

"Why the barrel?"

"It is more than likely that you know nothing about the habits of frogs," Dave said in a kindly voice. "Frogs don't live in cages, you know. They've got to have water, and plenty of it. Besides that, they're a lively sort of animal, frogs are, and we've got to screen the top of the barrel with a fine wire netting so they'll stay inside."

"We can rent a wheelbarrow from Smith, the hardware man," Joe volunteered, "and I'm pretty sure we can buy a barrel from him."

"Then why delay any longer?" asked Dave. "We will start at once, and to-morrow we'll have a fresh frogs' legs party."

Thus it was that, at a late hour in the evening, when their wives were safely anchored in Nutley, New Jersey, and other people in New York were preparing for the night's rest, Joe Runnels and Dave Wilbarger started for Smith's hardware store. Later on they might have been seen trundling along through the now semi-deserted streets, with Dave at the operating end of the barrow and Joe maintaining the barrel in place.

Mr. Hinkle greeted the little cavalcade with unalloyed surprise and some emotion.

"We wish to buy some raw frogs," said Joe.

"Live ones," Dave put in. "How many have you got and what's your rock-bottom price?"

The upshot of the matter was that the bird and animal man struck a bargain with his customers. He had, at the time, an even four hundred high-grade, young and healthy frogs.

"The whole lot, f. o. b., this store, for thirty-six dollars," he said, after figuring for some time on a pad of paper.

"Thirty-six seems a heap," said Joe.

"But think how long they'll last us," argued Dave. "And, furthermore," he said, thinking very deeply, "here's something else to reflect upon. These are probably frogs with family inclinations, and who knows that we will have to buy any more frogs at all? Suppose our frogs settle down and raise large and toothsome families.

"We'll eat the parents' legs and let the young 'uns grow up to a ripe maturity, after which we'll eat their legs and protect their children, and thus, on an initial investment of thirty-six miserable dollars, we will save hundreds in the course of future years."

"These may be all masculine frogs, for all you know," Joe retorted gloomily. "Ask Mr. Hinkle."

The frog man gave it as his unshakable opinion that if the frogs were given the right surroundings, plenty of water, and frog-food, they would undoubtedly split up into respectable families and nature would inevitably take its course.

Joe was satisfied and produced eighteen dollars.

While Mr. Hinkle prepared the frogs for their journey, Joe and Dave poured water into the barrel, and in half an hour the frogs were comfortably settled. Dave affixed the protecting wire-screen over the top and, aided by Joe, carried the barrel to the waiting wheelbarrow, and then the frog-buyers started home.

Arriving at the *porte-cochère* of the Swiss Arms, it occurred to Joe that it was against the rules to bring animals into the building, so it was necessary to reconnoiter in order to avoid sudden arrest by Mike Corkeran, the man-eating janitor of the Arms. They looked about and found the coast clear, and then began the most difficult part of the entire operation.

Those who have never tried to carry

a barrel filled with water and frogs up four flights of rather narrow-chested stairs, round sharp turns, will scarcely conceive the dangers of the task.

Dave elected to take the top side of the job, which forced him to grasp the top and bottom of the barrel and back up the stairway, and Joe, at this point, got much the worst of it. In addition to carrying far the heavier share of the burden, he was forced to remain below the mouth of the barrel, and half-way up the first flight a wave came out and spilled itself accurately down the back of his neck, causing him to burst into fiery conversation and nearly drop the barrel.

"Wait a minute!" he howled, and at the same moment a smaller wave hit him in the mouth.

"I'm not spilling it on purpose," Dave replied with dignity. "You ought to know that you can't carry a filled barrel up-stairs without—"

"Shut up," Joe roared, waking the family on that landing. He dropped his side of the barrel and wiped away the water.

"Some of that went into my mouth," he said angrily, "and now my tooth is aching again."

Naturally when a man has an aching tooth it is impossible to carry a barrel of frogs any further without stopping the pain. With very good nature, considering that the job was only started, David consented to having the tooth fixed, and they left the barrel on the landing while they repaired to Loenstein's for more toothache remedy, of which, as a matter of pure sympathy, Dave partook copiously.

How long the partners might have remained seated comfortably at a table fixing Joe's tooth, there is no way of telling, but at length Ed turned out the lights and they were forced to return to the work in hand.

They discovered, upon their arrival, a small figure in white peering into their treasure, and Dave yelled a word of admonition.

"Go to bed, you young scamp," he said. "What are you doing up at this hour?"

"Frogs," retorted the youngster—little Freddie Jerkins, son of Mr. and Mrs. Jerkins—who had been awakened by Joe's conversation during the overflow of water. "Frogs, frogs, frogs. Yuh stole 'em, didn't yuh? I'm goana tell on yuh. Yah! Frog-stealers!"

He vanished within the Jerkins apartment, voicing his scorn and suspicion, and Joe and Dave manfully renewed their battle with the barrel.

A half-hour later, thoroughly exhausted, covered with water and flushed with victory, they dragged their four hundred frogs safely through the door of the Runnels apartment, and wiped their damp faces.

"Gee, what a job!" said Joe.

"Nothing more to do now," replied Dave, "except to get it through the kitchen window to the fire-escape. The frogs will die if you keep them indoors."

Joe groaned dismally, but gave his assistance, and a few moments later they discovered something. The Runnels's kitchen window was an ordinary one, and immediately outside was the fire-escape, with a ladder descending from the floor above. Round this they found it was impossible to push the barrel to its place on the fire-escape.

It could be wiggled through, but not in an upright position, and after they had strained and pushed and pounded in vain, Dave sat down and reflected.

"There's nothing to it," he moaned. "We've got to empty the barrel, put it outside, and then fill it again."

"Why didn't you think of that before?" Joe snapped savagely. "See what time it is! We'll be at this job all day to-morrow."

"Remember," said Dave calmly, "half of them are your frogs."

"If we empty the barrel, what are we going to do with the frogs?"

"Put 'em," responded Dave, thinking rapidly—"put 'em in the bath-tub, and be sure to turn on the cold water, because if frogs hate anything, it's hot water. After we get the barrel outside we can fill it with water and transfer the frogs."

"This is the most complicated, everlasting, permanent job I ever tackled," Joe replied. "If you think I'm going to carry frogs—and besides, what'll we carry them in?"

"In a dishpan, hophead, or a wash-boiler or a pie-plate or an egg-cup," Dave said harshly. "What do I care what we carry them in? Can't you think one little, measly, dried-up thought for yourself? Do I have to think of everything? You make me sick."

"You got me into this," Joe snarled. "Now get me out. Whose house is this, anyhow?"

And so they quarreled bitterly for a while, being weary, and the clock having gonged the hour of three in the morning.

The barrel was again lugged laboriously down the hall and, with a mighty splash, water and frogs plunged into Mrs. Joe Runnels's bath-tub. Carrying the empty barrel between them and intent upon pushing it end first through the kitchen window, we will, for the moment, leave Joe and Dave to their toil and investigate another matter.

The Swiss Arms was ruled over by Mike Corkeran, the janitor, whose little boy, Junius Corkeran, had been taken away sick that very afternoon. The building catered to a class of people in moderate though respectable circumstances.

Mr. and Mrs. Schweiber lived on the first floor, and so did Mr. and Mrs. Guldenstein. Mr. and Mrs. Smoggins and Mr. and Mrs. Jerkins occupied apartments on the second floor, and on the third floor one might have found Mr. and Mrs. Dexberry and Mr. and Mrs. Rooney with the children. The Corkerans presided in the basement, and the Runnelses and Wilbargers were on the top floor.

It was about the moment jocund day was getting ready to stand tiptoe on the misty mountain top, had there been one round, when the fire broke out in the Swiss Arms.

No one has ever been able to explain what started the fire, and after it was all over it was found that there was really no occasion for the tempestuous panic that seized upon the sleeping residents of the Arms. The fire began in the basement, where was stored the usual accumulation of trunks, pails, wooden boxes, cans of excelsior, dry pine boards, barrels of paper, hat boxes, and similar inflammable objects.

The fire itself amounted to little, but the smoke that poured up through the dumb-waiter shaft and through the hall would have turned Mount Vesuvius green with envy. It was a gray, odorous, fear-inspiring smoke, and about one minute after it got under way Mr. Schweiber awoke from a sweet dream of peace and yelled:

"Fire!"

That one most potent word in the English language was sufficient. In another minute every mortal being was yelling "Fire" at the top of his lungs and dashing madly hither and yon to places of safety.

The occupants of the Swiss Arms poured from their various apartments clad in midsummer lingerie, pale pajamas, and other objects of desultory unimportance.

They dashed down the stairways, through the hall and into the street, and Janitor Corkeran gathered them into a brigade and took command of the white-robed refugees. And while all this was happening, Joe and Dave were up-stairs, transferring the frog-barrel to the fire-escape.

They were the very last to learn of the fire, partly on account of the noise they were making with the barrel, and partly because of the previous tooth-ache remedy. When they did learn of

it, they rushed down-stairs through clouds of smoke and joined the frightened assemblage.

The fire-engines came, and within ten minutes the bundle of burning rags in the cellar had been extinguished. The hose were withdrawn from the entrance and the occupants ordered back to bed or breakfast, as they preferred.

In the mean time the Swiss Arms underwent a slight change. In escaping from the burning building wherein instant death threatened, as they thought, the fleeing residents had opened their doors and left them open, as any one would do under the circumstances.

Even Joe and Dave, in their hasty departure, forgot to close the door leading from the Runnels' apartment to the outer hall, and in the heat of the excitement the four hundred frogs, designed for eating purposes, decided that life in a bath-tub was becoming monotonous.

Led by a resourceful one of their number they leaped over the side of the tub, hopped across the bath-room floor to the hall and escaped. It is possible that the fear of incineration stirred them, as it had moved the human residents. While the firemen were laboring and the Swiss Armenians were standing in the street, clad in nighties and early morning shivers, the four hundred frogs investigated the state of things and found everything wide open.

Not a door barred their movements. Not a person ordered them to desist, and presently the little band broke up into regiments and each regiment picked out an open doorway that appealed to it and entered without further ado.

"It's all over," Janitor Corkeran was saying about this time in comforting tones. "Go right in and have no fear. The fire's out. There's not a thing to worry about."

In which Mr. Corkeran was wrong. There was something further to worry about, and Mrs. Lucy Schweiber discovered it about one and one-fourth minutes after the janitor's assurance.

In entering her home, still clad in her regular night clothes, which included neither shoes nor stockings, she stepped with a cold, bare foot directly upon the hob-nailed back of a rapidly moving frog.

Mr. Schweiber was immediately behind his wife, which is the only thing that saved her, because after emitting a shrill scream of horror, she tried to leap over the banisters to the basement.

Instantly other screams pierced the morning air. Six or seven ladies and a number of small children mingled their agonized howls. In each apartment frogs were discovered, under beds, in halls, on chairs, beneath sinks and tables, and all the frogs were cold, slippery and productive of sudden chills.

The men folks attempted to calm their frantic families, meanwhile chivvying frogs about with brooms and walking-sticks, and for half an hour nothing was heard but the chattering teeth of women and the profane language of men.

In the hall there finally gathered Messrs. Corkeran, the janitor, Schweiber, Guldenstein, Smoggins, Aldwyne, Fitzguffin, Dexberry, and Jerkins. Strangely enough, Joe Runnels and Dave Wilbarger were absent, having seized upon the tumult as an excuse to hurry over to Loenstein's to see whether the morning man had opened up yet.

"This dastardly outrage will have to be avenged," declared Mr. Jerkins, who had been appointed chairman of the meeting. "Somebody is guilty of this crime, and we will mete out justice with our own hands."

At this point Joe and Dave returned from a fruitless quest and passed upstairs. The eyes of the committee followed them as they disappeared, and a sudden suspicion occurred to one and all.

"There they go!" a shrill voice yelled. It was little Freddie Jerkins, to whom the excitement had been delicious. "Frog-stealers!"

"What's that?" the elder Jerkins demanded.

Little Freddie then related the incident of the frog-filled barrel, and a moment later Joe and Dave entered their own apartment and closed the door directly in the face of the infuriated mob.

The empty bathtub explained everything.

Outside, the posse, intent only upon murdering the two comrades, banged and pounded upon the Runnelses' door, and death was only minutes away when another event occurred.

From below came the tread of marching feet, and the head of a blue-coated officer of the law appeared over the banisters.

"Don't move, anybody," the head commanded. "You're all under arrest. Get into your clothes and be ready to depart at once for Blackwell's Island."

"Who are you?" Jerkins requested.

"Officer Gilfogle of the health department," responded the man. "Don't let anybody escape, boys."

Six husky policemen scattered through the building.

"What's the charge?" again demanded Jerkins.

"Quarantine," said Officer Gilfogle. "You'll all have to go straight from here to the detention hospital on Blackwell's Island, men, women, and children."

"The pest-house!" exclaimed Mr. Fitzguffin, who knew about such things.

"The same," retorted Gilfogle carelessly.

"Why?" a chorus roared.

"Little Junius Corkeran, the janitor's son, who was taken away from here, is suffering from yttria," the health officer continued. "It's the most violent, malignant, and contagious form of yttria, too; hence the island."

"Look here, officer," said Jerkins insinuatingly. "You don't mean to say that you are going to send an entire building full of people to Blackwell's Island because of a single case of yttria?"

"Orders from headquarters," replied Gilfogle. "There'd be only one way in the world to avoid it, and that can't be had now, because if you were inoculated at all you'd have to be inoculated instantly, and we haven't got the serum and couldn't get it until night."

"What kind of serum?" Jerkins said hoarsely.

"Frog serum, of course," the health official answered. "You ought to know there's only one kind of serum used to prevent contagion from yttria. And we can't get the serum if we haven't got the frogs."

"Frogs!" shrieked eight strong men. "Frogs! The house is full of frogs."

And that's how the enraged Swiss Armenians left off trying to kill Joe Runnels and Dave Wilbarger. Each man darted into his own apartment and returned almost immediately with quantities of frogs in pails and washboilers. The astounded Gilfogle took in the situation at a glance, motioned to a man down-stairs, who proved to be the official vaccinator, and in half an hour the necessity of going to Blackwell's Island was obviated.

When the noise had quieted down, Joe and Dave opened their door and peered out. Strong arms seized them and bore them aloft, not in anger or with a desire to kill, but in recognition of the miraculous services they had rendered their fellow men.

And at this very moment there is, on the mantel in Joe's apartment, a silver loving-cup, a gift from the grateful tenants in memory of the event.

It bears the simple motto: "Our Saviors."

A Half-Portion Desert Island

By Albert Payson Terhune

GRAEME bent over the case, trying to scan the open book beneath the sheet of glass. But the uncertain light of the late winter day fell athwart the case in such a way as to turn the glass cover into a dull mirror and to blur all vision of the contents.

Graeme looked above and round him for an electric switch. Even artificial light, at a correct angle, would be an improvement on the oblique gray rays from the far-off nearest window. Then he remembered.

The electric lighting, like the telephones, the call bells, and the proposed burglar alarm system, had not yet been installed in the Spogg Museum.

He turned away in open annoyance, his hip striking against the case as he moved. Under the push the small case moved, too. And Graeme noticed that the table to which it was screwed had casters. It was the work of barely a minute to seize the table by one end and, guiding it carefully along the narrow aisle-space between high shelves, to trundle it to the window.

There, shut off wholly from view—his lawless action in moving the table having passed unnoted by any possible loitering attendant—Graeme was able to see through the glass the book wherein he was so keenly interested.

To the casual Philistine eye, the volume was scarce worth the trouble of wheeling its case so far.

It was perhaps twelve inches long by nine wide, and as thin as a pamphlet. The leaves were discolored. The antique type was half obliterated by the dark brown of the pages. The book lay open, its title-leaf and first page exposed to view. Above it, tacked to the back of the case, was the legend:

> THE TRAGEDY OF CORIOLANUS, BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE. FIRST EDITION (VARIORUM). BELIEVED TO BE ONLY COPY EXTANT. BOUGHT AT SALE OF DUKE OF CUMBERLAND'S LIBRARY IN 1904, BY THE LATE MR. PETER FARGUS, FOR $6,750. PRESENTED BY HIS HEIRS TO THE SPOGG MUSEUM, NEW YORK CITY. (PLEASE DO NOT LEAN ON CASE).

From his pocket Graeme drew a little magnifying glass, focused it with

some difficulty in the waning light, and brought it to bear on the precious pages. With the eye of a connoisseur, he studied the quaint, half legible type, the page borders, even so much of the cover's ragged edge as was visible.

For more than a half-hour he continued his rapt scrutiny, oblivious to everything but the disreputable-looking volume. Shut off from the sight of any passing visitor or attendant by the shielding rows of shelves that hemmed him in on three sides, he was alone in a world of his own and with a hobby that to him was almost a mania.

At last he straightened up, pocketed the glass, and, with a sigh of genuine sorrow, came back to the twentieth century and to New York. He was cramped from long stooping; his eyes ached, and he became vaguely aware that a newly erected building whose heating plant is not yet installed grows chill toward the end of a snowy January day.

"It's genuine," he muttered, half aloud, glancing once more at the brown pamphlet. "Genuine past doubt. Which cuts down the value of my own copy by something like seventy-five per cent. I wish I'd had sense enough in nineteen four to run over to the Cumberland sale. But how could I know? Three-fourths of those 'editions' at sales are spurious. The more advertised, the more likely to be fakes. It didn't seem worth the trip. I—"

He looked out of the window into the park. The snow had thickened until nearly all the vista was wiped out. A gale was sending the massed flakes against the pane with a ceaseless swishing sound and a succession of myriad tiny "ticks."

Graeme had come to the museum on foot. And, manlike, had worn no rubbers. At sight of the fast-increasing storm he resolved to strike for the nearest park gate and trust that his luck might send there a fare-seeking cab or a taxi. Assuredly, luck owed him something just then for robbing his adored "Coriolanus" of its value as unique.

Along the empty, echoing manuscript salon he hurried, out into the main upper corridor and down the wide spiral stairs to the ground floor.

The interior of the museum was gray-dusky.

There was barely light enough to show him the way to the arched foyer that ended in the bronze front doors. Not until he reached the doors—and tried them, and found them locked—did he realize that he had neither met nor passed nor seen any one during his hasty descent from the manuscript salon.

Yet, when he had gone thither on his search for the catalogued "Coriolanus," nearly an hour earlier, there had still been fifty or more people scattered through the main-floor rooms.

Graeme was locked in. Locked into the new-built marble museum erected, in the middle of Central Park's north meadow, by Alcides Spogg, philanthropist; and that day opened for inspection.

Alcides Spogg, having spent forty business years very industriously in forcing his fellow mortals to lift him from penury to multi-millionairedom, had scoured the earth intermittently for another decade in search of art treasures such as he had heard were a fad with Morgan and certain other wealth-kings. The results of his quest he had brought back—a huge and heterogeneous collection of purchases, ranging from junk to treasure.

To house these he had just erected the museum which was forever to bear his euphonious name. He had done more. He had presented the museum and its future contents to the City of New York. And, by pulling just the right wires, he had succeeded in overriding much newspaper protest and causing that museum to be erected in the northern reaches of the people's own and only local playground—the park.

Graeme, as a collector of note (and of wealth), had been honored with a card to the luncheon which, that noon, had preceded the museum's formal opening. He had refused the invitation; but a glance at the catalogue which accompanied it had sent him, later in the day, to verify—or, preferably, to discredit—an annoying statement therein, that a First Edition Variorum "Coriolanus" was one of the exhibits.

For ten of his thirty years Graeme had thrilled with a collector's joy in the belief that he, and he alone out of all the world, possessed such a volume. He had inherited the "Coriolanus"—along with his love for collecting—from his father. And now, as his investigation had just shown, there was another copy extant.

At present that bitter fact was mercifully blotted out by a very keen sense of annoyance at a far more trivial misfortune. Graeme was tugging vainly at the big bronze doors' inner handles. They refused to move. Loath to believe himself locked in, he turned and groped his way through the gathering dusk along the building's entire depth to the less pretentious rear entrance. There, too, he was confronted by a locked door.

He next made a circuit of the downstairs windows. These, as he remembered noting earlier, were guarded by grilles of ornamental but unbending bars. So, he now recalled, were those on the museum's second story.

Graeme understood. While he had been crouching there in that shut-off corner of the manuscript salon, oblivious to everything but the "Coriolanus," the closing hour had arrived. The few remaining visitors had been hurried out and the museum closed. Any chance attendant, passing through the central space of the manuscript salon, would, of course, have failed to see the solitary and absorbed man bending over the misplaced Shakespeare case. But, of course, the night watchman—

Feeling in his pocket for a tip that would calm that worthy's annoyance at having to fare forth from his lair and unbar one of the big doors, Graeme strode back into the center of the main corridor, at the base of the stairway, and lifted his voice in a mighty shout.

The effect, in that dim and vaulted place, was appalling. His cry was caught up in fifty different keys; twisted, grotesquely mimicked, and hurled back at him from walls, roofs, passageways, and chains of connecting rooms. Then it continued, for what seemed an eternity, to reverberate amid the black hollows of the domed ceiling far overhead.

Refusing to let the weirdness of it all get hold of him, Graeme filled his lungs for a second shout. But the cry died dumb, for before it could be voiced came an answer.

"All right!" called some one from the gloom of the second floor. "I'm coming!"

Light, rapid footsteps sounded on the marble stairs. Out of the upper shadows emerged a denser shadow, crowned by a splash of white. A woman in a dark dress and coat.

Graeme stood agape as she ran down the stairs toward him. There was just light enough for the patch of white above the black coat to resolve itself into the face of a girl. A pretty face, if just now a trifle impatient.

"Is it closing time?" asked the girl as she reached the stair foot.

"It is somewhat past closing time, I'm afraid," Graeme made answer.

"And is that to be the customary way of announcing it," she demanded, "by a watchman standing in the main hall and shouting to wake the dead?"

"I don't know," he answered. "You see, I'm not the watchman. But if you'll let me 'shout to wake the dead' once more perhaps I can rouse him. He must be somewhere about."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, looking

more keenly at Graeme through the dusk. "I beg your pardon. I didn't—"

"I don't blame you," he laughed. "The wish was father to the thought. Just now I'd rather see that watchman than any one else I can think of. And, next to him, a taxi chauffeur."

"Do you mean—" she began, puzzled.

"I mean," he rejoined, "we seem to be in the same boat, you and I. I thought I was the only one who overlooked closing time. I'm sorry—"

"It was stupid of me," she said. "I was writing my account of the opening exercises. In a little cubby-hole of a corner I found up there by a window. I got interested. I always do when I'm writing. Until I heard you call out I forgot—"

"You are a writer for one of the archeology magazines?"

"No, indeed. Nothing so high-brow. I'm a reporter. I was sent up here to write about the opening ceremonies this afternoon. We go to press at six o'clock. I must be at the *Hawk* office before then. Which is the way to the door? It's so dark I can't see what direction to go."

"There's a door over there to the left, and there is a pair of double doors to the right. But they're all locked. That's why I yelled for the night-watchman."

"We're—we're locked in?"

"I'm afraid so. Of course, there may be other doors. There's a basement. There's probably a door down there that we could unlock or force. But we won't need to. The night-watchman's certain to be somewhere about. Do you mind if I'll do some more 'dead-waking'?"

He shouted again. Then a third and fourth time. The echo caught up the sound in eldritch choral as before. Impulsively the girl caught at his arm.

"Don't!" she begged. "It — it sounds so horrible!"

"I have really much sweeter notes in my voice," he assured her. "But the 'horrible' ones have more carrying power."

"I didn't mean that," she stammered. "You know I didn't. It was those queer echoes I meant. They sound like a chorus of ghosts or — or—"

She faltered.

"I know," he consoled. "I know. It does get on one's nerves, doesn't it? But we mustn't let it. There's nothing to frighten us. At worst—if the watchman doesn't answer — we can find our way out somehow. But sha'n't we give him another chance?"

He opened his voice for one more hail. But she stopped him with an impulsive gesture; then promptly put both her hands over her ears.

"Don't!" she said again; and, "If a watchman is in the building—or in the park, for that matter — he heard you before."

"That's true," conceded Graeme. "And the answer is: There is no watchman in the building. How the great and generous Alcides Spogg would rave if he guessed that his conglomerate mass of riches and rubbish is unguarded except by a newspaper reporter and an amateur collector!

"But I'm not surprised. You see, the building was opened this afternoon for the first time. It isn't wholly finished yet. Workmen will be busy here for weeks to come. I suppose the man or men who have been looking after it at night must have thought the job of night-watchman would go to one of the museum attendants as soon as the opening day came. And whoever has been detailed by the museum as night-watchman probably thinks the original watchers will continue on duty till the building is finished."

"I suppose so. But the guards — the attendants—"

"Went home when closing-time came; as soon as they had perfunctorily shoved out all the visitors they could find. I remember, in London once, there was just such a blunder as

to who should be detailed as night-watchman of a new art gallery. And in the confusion the gallery was left unguarded for several nights.

"The curator didn't know. The public didn't know. In fact, only one man knew. How he found out I never heard. But he took a most unsportsmanlike advantage of the knowledge by going to the gallery on the last of those 'several' nights and carrying away seven priceless paintings. Cute of him, wasn't it?"

The girl shuddered and looked about her more nervously. Night had almost wholly closed in.

"Come!" said Graeme. "Let's begin our search for the exit. As it doesn't seem to be marked by a red light, as the law requires, we'd better take advantage of the few minutes of dusk that are left to us before night settles down. Will you come and help me look, or would you rather wait here for me?"

She stepped forward instinctively, then paused.

"I'll wait here, thanks," she replied, seating herself on the lowest step of the stairway.

Wondering a little that a girl who had shrunk from a mere echo should brave the loneliness of the big, darkening rotunda, Graeme set forth on his voyage of exploration. Five minutes later he returned. She had risen —perhaps at sound of his approach— and she moved forward uncertainly to meet him.

"Well?" she asked, breathless.

"Well," he answered, trying to speak cheerily. "I'm afraid you won't get to the *Hawk* office by six o'clock."

"But we go to press then. And my article— Is there no way out?"

"There are several. But they are all locked. I've been in the basement. One gets there by a flight of steps beyond the curator's room. I found two doors in the basement. Both locked and both too heavy to force. Also, an assortment of windows. All barred."

"Oh! But you called out. At least I thought I heard you."

"You did. But no one else did. I smashed one of the basement windows and stuck my head through as far as the bars would let me. Then I yelled at the top of my lungs. Half a dozen times or so."

"But surely, here in the very heart of New York—"

"And in the very heart of the season's first big snow-storm, too. Remember that. Here's the situation in a nutshell: This museum is a full quarter mile from the nearest park gate or city street in any direction. There is a fifty-mile gale blowing, and the snow deadens sound besides. One might empty a revolver over and over again into that storm without being heard a hundred yards away."

"But the park police?"

"Are not looking for pneumonia by patrolling the park paths to any great extent in weather like this. Neither are any stray pedestrians. If they were they couldn't hear, and the snow would mask any light. If we had one."

"Oh!" she cried, suddenly jubilant. "How stupid of us both not to think! The telephone—"

"Is not yet installed. Neither are the electric lights, nor"—with a shiver—"is the heating apparatus."

She sank down again on the steps, a wordless gasp attesting her first full realization of their plight. Graeme racked his brain for some word that might comfort her. He had spoken frankly, thinking it best that she should hear the inevitable truth at once than in driblets. Presently she asked in an awed, little voice:

"Then—then I'll have to stay here till to-morrow?"

He hesitated; then said bluntly:

"Have you forgotten what day to-morrow will be?"

"Why—Sunday."

"Yes. Sunday. Museum closed. Us here. Probably the snow will keep up all day. Looks like it now. The

wind, too. That means no one is likely to ramble in the park for amusement, and even the park police will stick pretty close to their beats. Unless they can scamp them altogether. There'll be a thick veil of snow flying between this museum and the nearest police beat.

"The wind will keep any one from hearing us as completely as the snow will keep us from being seen. There's not one chance in ten of a rescue before — before the museum is opened on Monday morning," he added miserably. "I hate to say this. But it's kinder than to—"

"I know," she said simply, hopelessly.

And of a sudden her teeth fell to chattering. Instantly Graeme whipped off his big overcoat and, in spite of her protests, wrapped it around her.

"It's as cold as Greenland in here," he said. "And I didn't make it much warmer by breaking that basement window. Come!"

"Where?"

"Into the curator's room. We can at least shut out some of the draft there. Beside, from as much of the looks of the place as I could gather when I went through just now, the workmen seem to have used it as a sort of lounging-room."

"But—"

"Where workmen lounge they are apt to eat. Where men have eaten there may still be scraps of food."

"I'm not hungry. Scraps of food—"

"What time did you lunch?"

"Oh, at one or half past one, I suppose. Why?"

"So did I. And by nine o'clock Monday morning we're both likely to have a bit of an edge on our appetites. I'm going to look for a way to dull that edge. Come."

Speechless, dazed, she rose and followed him.

"Better give me your hand," he suggested. "It's pretty dark. I have a fair idea of the direction. But—"

"Haven't you any matches?" she queried, finding her voice. "I thought all men carried matches."

"My case is about half-full," he said. "Luckily."

"Then light one, won't you? I can't see my way."

"I'd rather not," he returned, "until I have to. Listen, Miss—Miss—"

"Johnson," she supplied. "But why don't you want to—"

"Light a match? I will presently. When we get to the curator's room and I have to explore. But not till then. Unless I lose my way. Listen, Miss Johnson," he went on, as he slowly groped his way along the rotunda toward the far corridor.

"We are the sole inhabitants of a desert island, you and I. A little half-portion desert island, if you like. But none the less a desert island because several million people are all round us. We're castaways. Till we're rescued we have to 'live on the country.' And on our own resources.

"What would you think of a man on a real desert island who began his occupancy by burning away all his matches? We're lucky that I don't have to make fire with stick-and-cord. I had to out in Arizona once."

She laughed. A shaky, mirthless little laugh of submission. And just then they came to the end of their pilgrimage. Graeme fumbled for a knob, found it, and opened a door. They passed over the threshold, the girl gripping the man's hand in nervous terror.

Graeme struck a match, held it carefully guarded between his hollowed palms, and glanced about him.

The girl had dropped his hand and was staring big-eyed round the littered room. To her it was merely a half-furnished, wretchedly untidy place, where odds and ends of every description were strewn. It all smelled nauseatingly of rank and stale tobacco. Very evidently the curator had not yet taken possession.

Graeme strode across the room and,

from a waste-box in one corner, plucked forth a short white cylinder, to which he applied his almost burned-out match. Then the girl saw what he had found. It was a two-inch remnant of an enormously thick and smudge-covered candle.

"Plumber's dip!" he elucidated, holding it aloft in triumph as its wick sputtered and coughed. "And see—here are three or four more odds and ends of the same sort of candle, running from an inch to three inches long. When the plumbers were through with the candle-ends they chucked them into that rubbish-box. I'm glad their boss plumber on this job wasn't stingy and didn't make his men burn them all down to the last half-inch. Yes, here are—let's see—seven of them. No. Eight."

"Oh, let's light them all!" she begged. "And range them on the mantel. The place will look less like a garbage-strewn vault then."

"The place would look like the darkness of Egypt in an hour or two," he gaily rebuked. "For they'd all burn out and leave us in pitch blackness. No, no. One at a time, if you don't mind. I think you'll find that biggest chair fairly comfortable, if you'll always bear in mind its infirmity and humor it. You see, it has only three legs. Don't trust it too far. I hoped there might be a fireplace under this shelf. Since there isn't, we must find some other way of getting warm. Hello!"

He broke off with a cry and pounced on something that stood on the floor in a dark corner.

"The ancient party emblem!" he announced delightedly. "The 'full dinner-pail!' I knew it was full as soon as I saw it. When they're empty the cup on top is generally turned upside down—to dry. It's full! This solves the problem of one meal, at least."

As he talked he was easing the top from the can.

"I know the clue to this dinner-pail mystery, too," he proclaimed. "In the museum story in the papers this morning it said that the workmen, as well as the invited guests, would have a collation here to-day. Evidently one man at least didn't know that, and brought his dinner-pail. Then, preferring ice-cream and chicken salad to home-made indigestibles, he thriftily left his dinner here for Monday.

"See?" exploring further into the dinner-pail. "One ninety-degree segment of pie. Presumably apple, by the looks. Item: a large square of cheese. I didn't know American laborers ate it. Item: one pint of pallid and gelid liquid—presumably coffee. A feast for the gods. When the gods get hungry enough. How about a sandwich?"

"No, thanks?" she demurred. "I'm afraid I'll have to be starving before I could swallow one of those. But a little coffee wouldn't taste badly just now," she finished, bravely trying to enter into his spirit of forced gaiety. "If only it were hot!"

"All in good time," Graeme promised. "Wait a minute. Do you happen to know or recall where the Aztec Room is? Never mind, though. Here's a crumpled wad of to-day's *Hawk*. I remember, it had a ground-plan diagram of the museum."

He picked the paper from the floor, spread out its crushed folds, turned to the third page, and gravely consulted a diagram thereon.

"In the farthest wing on this floor," he commented.

Then he rose, lighted a second candle, and made for the door.

"Do you mind waiting a minute or two alone?" he asked. "Or would you rather come along?"

Again she hesitated. And again, on the brink of joining him, she refused.

A few minutes later Graeme came back, candle in one hand, and in the other carrying a large and rough-molded receptacle of unmistakable Aztec pottery, whose once gay hues had

mellowed and blackened into a neutral soot-tint. The girl was sitting just as he had left her.

"Brazier," he explained. "Biggest of the three there. Pottery brazier of Montezuma's time. There are pottery braziers in all Aztec rooms. 'Pottery is the art that differentiates barbarians from mere savages.' John Fiske wrote that. Maybe it's true. If so, let's be glad the Aztecs were barbarians. Good old Aztecs!"

As he talked he set the brazier in the middle of the floor, tore a few strips from the newspaper, crumpled them in the bottom of the receptacle, and, drawing out his penknife, proceeded to whittle kindling shavings from the edges of the waste-box. These went on the paper strips and on them in turn were laid the splintered sides of the box itself, torn asunder by main force.

After which Graeme picked up the most ruinous of the room's chairs and, at a blow, smashed it to pieces on the tiled floor. A few of the fragments he laid atop the kindling. Then with a candle he lighted the pyre, and, when the blaze was under way, clapped on the flat, perforated lid of the brazier.

The girl watched him with unwilling interest, admiring his quiet deftness. He crowned the fire-building task by setting the pint of coffee in a tin can on the brazier-top to heat.

"One pint of doubtful coffee will inaugurate our half-portion desert island's first half-portion meal," he said grandiloquently, dumping out the contents of the dinner-pail. "Then we possess in our larder one wedge of undoubtable pie. And one, two, three, four sandwiches of—no, let's see—one, two—three sandwiches. I was wrong in the first count. Three. Not four."

He glanced covertly at the girl. Her pale face had gone magenta red.

"What was it she said?" he mused. "She'd 'have to be starving' before she could eat one of them, hey? Well, she's evidently been 'starving' enough while I was away to consume twenty-five per cent of our visible breadstuff supply. Poor kid! She looks as if she'd been robbing a poor-box!"

He picked up the empty dinner-pail, opened the room's barred window, and scooped in a half-pailful of snow from the sill.

"I'm going to let this melt," he explained to his companion. "Snow doesn't make the best drinking water. But it's better than none. Besides, I want to dampen a sheet of that newspaper and wrap up our sandwiches and pie in it. It will keep them from drying out. You know, we must be careful in storing our food. It will probably have to last us till Monday."

He poured out into the dinner-pail's cup some of the heated coffee and offered it to her. She was leaning over the brazier, warming her fingers. Graeme noticed that her hands were shaking as from palsy.

"Drink this!" he ordered. "It is hot and it will save you from a chill."

"I'm not cold any more," she declared. "I'm getting nice and warm, thanks to you. Aren't you going to drink any of it yet? Or—or eat?"

"No, thanks," he said. "Not yet"—mentally resigning himself to a thirty-six-hour fast, since his fellow-prisoner had so exigent an appetite.

"So you are a reporter?" he went on easily. "It must be a pleasant career. Exciting, too, isn't it?"

"Oh, very," she replied vaguely. "The—the fires and robberies and murders—and embezzlements and all. They are very interesting for me to write about."

He looked keenly at her. Then he understood the distraction of her manner. She was listening. Palpably listening. To what?

Just then she caught his inquisitive gaze and spoke hurriedly:

"And you are a collector?" she asked, very apparently talking at random. "I think you said something

about being an 'amateur collector,' didn't you? May I ask—"

He had risen abruptly to his feet. So abruptly as to break short the thread of her talk. For, as she had been speaking, he, too, had begun to listen, though not to her. And, in a momentary lull in the gale that buffeted the window with its million tiny snow-hammers, he had heard an unexpected sound.

A faint sound, almost blurred to nothingness by wind and distance. Yet, distinctly, it was a footstep. The click of a shoe-heel's nails against a stone floor or pavement.

Graeme's first glad thought was that the lighted window had drawn the eye of some storm-brave policeman who was coming to investigate. At the next second he realized that by this time there must be several inches of snow on the ground. No boot-heel could penetrate through that dense covering and strike so ringing a sound on the pavement beneath.

No, the step came from somewhere in the building. And Graeme choked back the premature announcement of a rescuer's approach. As he stood the step sounded again. More faintly this time, as though the walker were exercising care to atone for an incautiously loud move. And now Graeme partly located the sound. It came from the upper floor. Therefore it was not the step of a watchman or other attendant entering the museum.

The girl, talking, seemed to have missed both sounds.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Why did you get up so suddenly? You startled me."

"My teeth had begun to chatter, too," he answered. "We can make this room a lot warmer. There are two more braziers back in the Aztec room. Will you wait here for me a few minutes? I won't be long."

"Sha'n't I come with you?" she offered. "I could carry a candle or one of the braziers."

"Thanks," he said. "But if you don't mind, I'd rather you'd stay here and keep an eye on the fire. It isn't over-safe, leaving a brazier unguarded in a room that's littered with papers and splinters. Besides, that brazier's a thousand years old. It may fall apart. If it does, call me. The Aztec room is 'way down at the far end of the south wing, on this floor. But I can hear if you call."

Candle aloft, he went out, closing the door behind him. Then extinguishing and pocketing the light, he stooped and unlaced, then removed, his shoes. The stone floor struck cold as ice against his silk-clad soles.

Across the corridor and rotunda he sped, noiseless, guided through the unobstructed spaces by knowledge of his direction, until he came to the stair-foot. Up the stairway he hurried, ears straining.

Past the broad first and second landings he ran, and up the last six steps that led to the second floor. At the second step from the top, as he was still at full speed, he collided violently with some one who had just begun to descend the stairs.

Graeme instinctively threw forward his arms at the impact. They seized in involuntary embrace the body of a man.

The collision had knocked both Graeme and the unknown off their balance. Graeme tottered backward, his arms still convulsively gripping the other. And together they fell down the short flight.

As he toppled Graeme had presence of mind to twist sharply to one side, spinning the other man round with him. Thus as they fell to the landing Graeme was uppermost.

Broken as was his short fall by the cushion-effect of the body beneath him Graeme was half-stunned. The breath was knocked out of him. For a moment he lay there in the pitch darkness, arms round his foe, fighting to breathe and to collect his scattered senses.

After which he proceeded to

scramble up, panting, and to put one knee on the fallen man's chest. There was no need. The man lay limp and moveless.

For an instant Graeme waited. No sound came from beyond the closed door of the curator's room. Evidently the dull noise of the fall had been drowned by the bellow of the wind and by distance. Graeme was grateful. He was glad the girl did not know of the intruder's presence. He decided then and there that she should know nothing of it till morning. Her nerves were badly shaken enough as it was.

Reaching in his pocket for candle and matches, Graeme struck a light. The senseless man lay on the landing, clearly illumined by the yellow gleam of the wick. Graeme bent over him.

The candlelight revealed a youth of twenty-three or less; slender, delicate of face, and clad in formally correct afternoon dress. Graeme had expected to see a fiction burglar, in cap, mask, and neckerchief. He stared in wonder at the carefully attired exquisite before him.

Then his eye roved from generalities to details. At least to a single detail. In one outflung hand the prostrate man was grasping something.

It was the crust of a thick-cut sandwich with a shred of dark-colored meat dangling from it.

Graeme roused himself from his momentary trance of bewilderment. Kneeling, he laid a hand over the youth's chest. The heart was still beating. Indeed, the victim gave various signs of slow-returning consciousness. A quick manipulation of joints and bones failed to locate any fracture or other injury.

Graeme picked him up bodily and carried him to the floor above. There, going to one of the several corner closets he had observed that afternoon, he opened its door, deposited his burden on a heap of loose plaster piled there, closed the door and turned the key that was in its lock.

As he retraced his way his stockinged foot struck something that skittered tinklingly along the floor. Investigating, Graeme saw that the object was a key. He picked it up. It was far larger than that of the closet door he had just locked. Though, like that, and like every other key he had seen in the new building, it bore a label on a paper tag. Graeme read the label, then pocketed the key. And again he started toward the curator's room, stopping only twice on the way. Once to pick up the crust of sandwich, once to put on his shoes.

"I didn't get the braziers after all," he announced as the girl looked up from her three-legged chair to greet him.

"You got all dust, though!" she exclaimed, as his disheveled aspect broke upon her. "How—"

"Yes," he answered very quietly. "And I got this."

He held up the remnant of sandwich. The girl went sick-white. She stared at him, open-mouthed, dumb. Her terror touched him.

"Miss—Johnson," he said, though not unkindly. "Just for once I worked in a newspaper office during my senior year vacation. That is why I was interested on hearing you were a newspaper woman. But — another time, may I suggest that you remember a few facts about newspaper work? You spoke of your 'account' and your 'article,' and said the *Hawk* goes to press at 6 P.M.

"Those breaks were what first set me to wondering. 'Accounts' and 'articles' in newspaper language are always 'stories.' That's the only term ever used. No newspaper on earth goes to press at 6 P.M. And—in New York, at least—no girl reporter is ever sent out, as you said you were, on 'fires, or robberies, or murders,' or on embezzlement stories. I just mention it. Now, as to the sandwich—"

"The sandwich!" she stuttered brokenly. "I—I took it out into the corridor and ate—"

"You poor, poor little girl!" he interrupted, almost fiercely, her child-like fright breaking down his barriers of justice. "Don't look like that! No one is going to punish you. Don't look as if you'd been sworn at! Please don't! You'll go free. I promise. And I've found a key to one of the basement doors."

"You found it!" she babbled. "You found it? Where?"

"Up-stairs. On the floor. Near a corner closet. He dropped it there, didn't he?"

"Oh, we didn't know where he dropped it! We looked everywhere. And the light was so bad it must have fallen out of his pocket when he—"

She caught herself up belatedly; crushing one small hand over her mouth as might a child who has unwittingly betrayed a secret. Then she began to cry.

"There! There!" he soothed awkwardly. "Don't! Don't, dear! It's all right, I tell you. You sha'n't suffer for any of this. I'll let him go, too, if you like. Only, don't cry like that. Lord! If you'd cry like a woman I wouldn't mind. But you're crying like a frightened little child in the dark. Don't, I say! I didn't mean to make you unhappy. It's your first job, isn't it?"

"I'm—I'm not a thief!" she protested brokenly, catching the drift of his question. "It's mine — ours, by rights. Father just gave it to him to keep safely till we were grown. And —and we couldn't prove it. And he left it to this miserable old museum. And—and it's ours. And we came to get it."

"We? Who are 'we'? And what did you come here to get?"

"The — the 'Coriolanus.'" She wept, all barriers down, now. "It's ever so valuable. And Clement needs the money to get him through the last year's post-graduate course at Heidelberg. He's set his heart on it. And a thousand dollars would be enough. And the 'Coriolanus' is worth nearly seven thousand. And — we've just enough to live on decently—"

"Miss Johnson," interposed Graeme, trying to marshal her fast-flung statements into some semblance of sense, "if you mean the 'Coriolanus' up-stairs, it's not worth, now, more than two thousand dollars at the outside. Because I have a copy like it, and—"

"My name isn't Johnson!" she flashed. "It's Fargus. I'm sick and tired telling lies. I hate to. But what could I do?"

"Tell me about it, won't you?" he asked gently. I think I see a way to help."

Brokenly and in bits, under clever questioning, the story came out. The niece and nephew of the late Peter Fargus, hearing that the "Coriolanus" was to be taken from the estate's safe-deposit vaults—to which they did not have access—to the Spogg Museum, to which every one would have access, had hit on a mildly ingenious plan for regaining the treasure that they deemed their own.

Going to the museum on the opening day, they had first located the position of the coveted book, and then had strolled in apparent aimlessness about the building. Roaming through the basement, Clement Fargus had taken from one of the outer doors its key; knowing the superintendent or watchman must in all likelihood have a set of master-keys.

Then, as the afternoon waned, the two had secreted themselves behind a line of shelves in an obscure up-stairs exhibition room and had waited until the museum should be empty. They planned to abstract the "Coriolanus" at closing time, and, dodging any night-watchman, to let themselves out through the basement door, whose key they had secured.

Then had come the first mischance. Clement—probably in taking a handkerchief from his pocket—had lost the key. And when, just after the closing hour, they went back to the

manuscript salon, the "Coriolanus" was no longer in its former place. They could not find it.

While they were looking, Graeme's halloo had interrupted them. Supposing he was the watchman, and that he had heard them moving about, the girl had hurried down to meet him, in the hope that he would think she alone had been belated in the museum. Thus, after her departure, giving her brother another chance to find the key or the "Coriolanus," or both, and to make his own escape.

The sister had taken advantage of Graeme's trip to the basement to run up-stairs and tell Clement the new turn matters had taken. And again she had slipped away to see him, bearing the sandwich, and warning him that it might be his last food until Monday.

"And now," said Graeme, when she had finished and fell to sobbing again, "suppose we all go home. First, let's go up and let Clement loose. Oh, yes. I forgot to say, I locked him up, just to keep him on hand. Then we'll go and get you the 'Coriolanus.' I know where it is, and why it isn't where it was. Then let's get out of this dreary mausoleum and wade to the nearest taxi stand."

"But," she protested, finding her voice as they started hand in hand up the stairway, "won't you get into trouble for helping us take the 'Coriolanus?' You see, it's really ours, but it isn't yours. And—"

"If there is one thing I enjoy better than spending Sunday in a museum," returned Graeme, "it is compounding a felony. On Monday morning this museum will receive, anonymously, by mail, a 'Coriolanus.' Before they miss this one."

"But—"

"It will be one that belongs to me," went on Graeme lightly. "I valued it as the apple of my eye when I thought it was the only one on earth. Now that I know there's another in existence, it's so much waste-paper to me. Don't ask me why. I can't explain. Any collector would understand.

"If a man is licked in a fight for the championship of the world, it's no pleasure to him to reflect that he's the second best fighter on earth. All he knows is that he's not the best. That's the idea I'm trying to get at. And, now, shall we hurry a little faster?

"My wife will be worrying if I'm not home pretty soon."

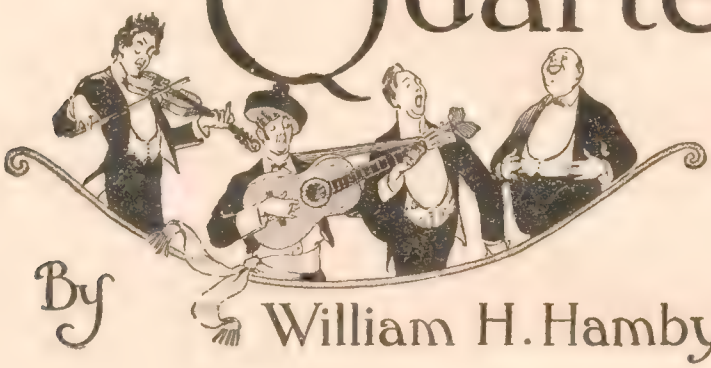
LOVE'S PHILOSOPHY.

THE Fountains mingle with the River
And the Rivers with the Ocean,
The winds of Heaven mix forever
With a sweet emotion;
Nothing in the wind is single,
All things by a law divine
In one spirit meet and mingle,
Why not I with thine?

See the mountains kiss high Heaven
And the waves clasp one another;
No sister-flower would be forgiven
If it disdained its brother,
And the sunlight clasps the earth
And the moonbeams kiss the sea:
What are all these kissings worth
If thou kiss not me?

Percy Bysshe Shelley.

The Laughing Quartet



By William H. Hamby

I.

RAND BRADSHAW left his boarding-house and sauntered down Church Street. It was ten o'clock, and the August night was still too hot to invite sleep. He had finished his summer's work and was resting in Springfield for a short time.

The young man went round the square and down to the Frisco railroad tracks. Down a side street he saw a crowd gathered under an arc-light. A man stood on a box — no doubt a street faker selling cubes of soap for twenty-five-cent tooth-wash or bottled rain-water for rheumatism.

Rand was about to saunter on when the fellow began to speak, and his voice carried the block and a half with penetrating clearness. He was quoting from "King John":

> To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
> To throw a perfume on the violet;
> To smooth the ice, or add another hue
> Unto the rainbow, or with taper-light
> To seek the beauteous eye of Heaven to garnish,
> Is wasteful and ridiculous excess.

Rand stopped, astonished. He knew the voice instantly. There could be none other like it—high, a little thin, but with marvelous carrying power and strange musical effect. But it could not be Edgar Watson Gardner. Why, not two weeks before he had heard him lecturing to the greatest Chautauqua audiences in the Mississippi Valley at two hundred dollars an hour. That great lecturer could not be out street-faking. Impossible!

But when Rand joined the motley crowd gathered round the dry-goods box he knew he was right. The eyebrows were blackened, there were painted lines in the face—but the eyes, the voice—there could be no mistake.

"Friends," said the faker, taking up a guitar, "is there any one in the crowd who thinks he is a good laugher? If there is I'll give him a dollar if he can stand on this box and laugh for one minute without stopping."

No one ventured to try it.

"Then I'll give you some music."

He played several comic and mournful airs fairly well.

Then he started on the weird, mournful old song, "Hard-hearted Barbara Allen."

He played and sang one verse and stopped, trying to remember.

"Friends," he said seriously, "I have never been able to find the rest of that song. If any of you know it I will give you five dollars to sing and play the rest of it for me."

Directly he again began to sell his wares—it was safety-razors this time.

Rand watched with a mingled feeling of awe and amusement. The great lecturer, Edgar Watson Gardner, haranguing a motley crowd of negroes, street loafers, and town characters on the virtues of a ninety-seven-cent safety-razor!

In a few minutes he noticed the faker had his eyes on him. Rand felt his face to see if he needed a shave; smiled knowingly to show he was not to be fooled. But the look did not mean safety-razors. The man was watching him for some other purpose.

In half an hour Rand turned away. The night wind was coming up, and he began to think of sleep. He had not gone a block until he heard the crowd breaking up, and when he looked back at the corner he saw the street-faker coming toward him.

For four blocks every time he looked back he saw the fellow still following, about a half block behind.

Rand stopped on the porch of his boarding-house and waited for him to go by—or perhaps he had engaged board there.

He came up hurriedly and dropped his heavy suit-cases by the walk.

"Is this Mr. Rand Bradshaw?" he said as he approached the young man.

"Yes."

"My name is Henry Bennett," said the faker. "May I see you at once on a matter of great importance? I have to leave on the one o'clock train."

"Yes," replied Rand; "come up to my room."

II.

Rand turned on the light and offered his visitor a chair by the open window. Now, at close range, he was still absolutely sure it was Edgar Watson Gardner, but decided not to show any signs of recognition.

"Of course, you don't remember me." The faker turned with a smile to the young man, and his eyes were keen, clear blue. "I met you once in a hotel at Dallas. You are, I believe, an agent for the Associated Lyceum Bureau, and sell talent to Chautauquas and lyceum committees."

"Yes," nodded Bradshaw.

He was surprised the fellow knew him at all.

"That is why I wanted to see you." Bennett rested a long, shapely hand on his knee and looked down thoughtfully at the fingers. "If it is not an impertinence, may I ask if your salary is satisfactory?"

"It is not," Rand laughed. "That is no secret. I have recently told the company so, and don't know yet how they will take it; I worked on commission last year and did fairly well. This year I have had twenty-five a week and expenses. I want more—and need it."

Again the young man laughed.

"I need the assistance of a young man like you," said Bennett, studying him appraisingly. "It may take two months or it may take a year. I'll give you fifty a week and expenses and count it a full year if it only takes a month."

"What is the proposition?"

"I have a money-making idea in the entertainment line—if I can find just the right men. I want to organize what I will advertise as the 'Laughing Quartet.' I want a rare guitar player—one that has just picked it up and plays naturally; a natural-born fiddler, a good singer that never had a lesson in his life, and a laugher—a fellow that can laugh a half-hour without a break."

"You want them for street work?" asked Rand.

"N-o, not necessarily. My idea is to use the opera-houses mostly in towns from two to ten thousand.

"Now, what I want you for is to

find that quartet for me. You may have to travel all over the country and pick up one here and one there. But clinch them when you find them. I'll stand for good salaries."

Rand studied a minute. It looked like a snap, if there were no strings to it.

"But suppose I don't find what you want?"

"That is my lookout. What I am hiring you for is to hunt. You have heard all sorts of speakers and singers and entertainers. You have, too, I think, been among all classes of people. I believe you can find the company I want."

There were a whole lot of things not clear to Rand, such, for instance, as why one of the most famous lecturers on the American platform was traveling in disguise and undertaking to organize such a company as this. But no matter—it was a big offer.

"I'll take the job," he said without reservation.

"Good." Bennett's cool blue eyes lighted. "You can begin at once?"

"Yes."

"Then be at the depot for the one o'clock train to Kansas City. You have a half-hour in which to pack."

They registered at the Baltimore, in Kansas City, next morning at eight. While at breakfast Bennett remarked:

"We can't do anything until to-morrow. I shall advertise to-day, and make arrangements for you to meet applicants.

"I think we had better try for just one at a time. We will look for the laugher and guitar-player first. They will be the hardest to get.

"I may not see you again for a day or two; but you will notice by the want advertisements I put in the papers the time and place of your appointments. And in the mean time you may make any personal search for talent that you like. Remember when you get the quartet together you get a full year's salary, even if it is to-morrow."

Rand went out in town after breakfast, and soon made himself acquainted with two or three fellows who would likely know a great deal about singers and players. He got the names of a number of possible candidates for his quartet and went back to the hotel to await the first edition of the afternoon papers.

He found three advertisements in each of the city papers, each advertisement in a separate column.

> Wanted—An unusual guitar-player. One who plays by ear preferred. Apply at 10 A.M., Saturday. Room 44, Blotter House.

> Good Laugher Wanted—A show troupe wants a good laugher; a man who can laugh twenty minutes without a break. Apply room 104, Walden Hotel, 3 P.M. Saturday.

> Guitarists Attention! Will pay a good salary to the right party. Want a natural guitar-player of unusual ability. Apply parlor C, Coates House, 8 P.M. Saturday.

"A little bit odd," Rand said to himself, laying the paper down. "But our friend Bennett seems to be rather an odd character, anyway."

Both the first two places named for applicants were in doubtful parts of the city. Still, of course, in seeking natural musicians one was as likely to find them in the Tenderloin or shabby boarding-house quarters as anywhere.

That evening Rand drifted about town, went into music-halls, vaudeville theaters, and moving-picture houses—anywhere that he heard the sound of stringed instruments. His mind was centered on a guitar-player first.

At ten next morning he went to the Blotter House, over in the north end.

"Was there a room engaged here for Rand Bradshaw for ten o'clock?"

"Why, yes," said the blear-eyed clerk; "but I give you the key a few minutes ago."

"I beg your pardon," said Rand politely, "but I just came."

"Oh, I remember," said the muddled clerk. "It was the other feller that took the other room. Here's forty-four."

And Rand took the key and went up the musty stairs that smelled of dirt and rotting carpet.

III.

RAND BRADSHAW found the hall on the second floor chock full of guitar-players. It looked like a cheap minstrel show just in from a long trip on the ties. There must have been twenty-five, all ages, sizes, and colors, lined up waiting for the door of Forty-four to open.

The young man inserted the key and, as the line pressed forward, turned to them:

"Just keep your places. I'll see you one at a time in the order you stand. And all of you will have a chance to be heard."

Rand let in the first one and locked the door on the inside.

The room was already arranged. There was a small writing table with pencil and paper, and behind it a chair. In the middle of the room was another chair.

"Be seated." Rand motioned the player to the chair. He was a thin, sleepy-looking fellow, with pasty face and hands bordered with cigarette yellow.

"Play," said Rand, leaning back comfortably.

The fellow began to thrum the strings. Now, Bennett had made even a wiser selection of an agent than he knew; for young Bradshaw had an unusually sensitive appreciation of music, as well as good business ability.

"That will do." Rand raised his hand before three bars were played, politely showed the fellow out, and called "Next!"

He disposed of five in rapid succession—a Swede, a negro, an Italian, and two Americans.

The sixth interested him. He was a small, blond young man with big, pale-blue eyes, and he played almost without a flaw.

"You understand music?" said Rand.

"Yes, I've been studying it all my life."

He was the sort of fellow that would appeal to formal musical organizations; but Rand remembered that Bennett had expressed a preference for untrained players.

"I'll take your name and address," said Rand. "Meet me here at this time next Tuesday. I can't promise anything, but I'll give you another hearing."

Ten others passed in rapid succession, and then one more was selected for another hearing.

The line was nearly finished and Rand felt disappointed. He was almost sure neither of the two he had chosen would meet Bennett's requirements.

Two more were quickly sent on their way. He went to the door. Only one remained. He sat carelessly in the window at the end of the hall.

"All right! I'm ready for you!" called Rand.

The fellow sauntered down the hall, the guitar under his arm, humming lightly but mournfully. He was a little under the average size, had swarthy skin, black mustache and hair, and bluish-green eyes with long, dark lashes.

"Have a chair," Rand invited deferentially, for he instinctively recognized this fellow had some sort of unusual ability.

The fellow sat down nonchalantly, threw the ankle of his left leg across his right knee, rested his guitar on his lap, and, without waiting for an invitation, began to play.

He picked the strings idly but lovingly, his eyes roving about the room in a detached way, as though he was thinking of something entirely different.

His fingers quickened, and almost unconsciously his voice, rich and mel-

low, caught up the music in a soft, minor chant.

It was strange music to Rand—but was music; there was no doubt of that. And, best of all, the fellow played by ear; for there were many technical faults. But even the faults added fascination to his playing.

He finished and looked up and showed his teeth in an inquiring smile.

"Play something else."

He did; and, urged on by Rand, played again and again.

"Where did you learn?" asked Rand, at last stirring from the trance of the music.

The player shrugged his shoulders and gave an expressive wave of his hand.

"Most everywhere — nowhere — I just picked it up."

"Perhaps you are Spanish?" suggested Rand, with a smile.

"Maybe," assented the other.

"Your name and address?" Rand took up his pencil.

The guitar-player hesitated a moment.

"Luke Basto," he said.

"Your address?"

Again a shrug of the shoulders.

"A message left here will reach me."

"You can come again Tuesday?" Seeing the player hesitate, Rand hurried on: "I can't close the contract to-day. But I assure you I am mighty pleased, and the salary will be a good one. Come Tuesday at ten, and we will go over the details."

"Perhaps," he said, and strolled out out as nonchalantly as he came.

At half past two Rand went to the Walden Hotel. He thought he would get ahead of the rush. The Walden was not squalid like the Blotter, but it was still in a questionable part of the city; and all its finishings and furnishings were of a cheap garishness.

He got the key to No. 104 and took the elevator to the third floor. The room was near the hall, and he was glad to see he was in time to avoid the rush. Only two or three people loitered along the corridor, and perhaps they were not laughers.

Rand went direct to his room. As he passed No. 103 the door slammed quickly and he heard the key turn in the lock. Something about it gave him the impression the door was closed because he was passing; but perhaps it was only a notion.

He found this room arranged much as the other. He left the door open and sat down at the table to wait.

Rand smiled to himself. This was sure a queer proposition — testing men's ability to laugh. How would he do it? And would he have any applicants?

"Hello!"

A tall, thick fellow with heavy jaws, looked like a miner or a fireman, stood in the doorway.

IV.

"Come in!" Rand motioned toward the vacant chair.

The fellow entered, heavy and slouching. He looked anything in the world but a laugher.

The young man explained briefly what was wanted.

"Now, you can show me what you can do in the way of laughing."

The fellow dropped his heavy jaw and let out one of the most blood-curdling, diabolical "haw-haws" Rand ever heard.

"Stop, stop!" he ordered, throwing up his right hand. "That will not do!"

Three others stood at the doorway, looking in, grinning. They had begun to come already, though it was twenty minutes ahead of time.

As Rand got rid of the heavy laugher the amusement on the faces of the others gave him an idea. He would leave the door open all the time, and those watching would get to laughing at those trying—and maybe he would get some real laughs.

The next one he called in was a tall, lank, solemn, bald-headed fellow that

looked as though he might be a joke-writer out of a job.

"Go at it," directed Rand when the fellow was seated.

The long, bony face wreathed into a smile, parted with a grin, ran into a chuckle, and broke into a laugh that was side-hurting. It was a good laugh, but Rand timed him, and saw he could not last longer than six minutes. But he took his name and address, and asked him to come again Tuesday.

By this time there were a dozen or more in the hall, clustered round the door, all trying to see at once. It was a motley array—fat and lean, solemn and comic, bushy-headed and bald, white-faced and bloated.

But by the time he had put three more through the paces the crowd outside had begun to laugh among themselves. The noise attracted the attention of the hotel employees. A half-dozen guests came out of their rooms and joined the group. Chambermaids, bell-boys, porters flocked round.

The next applicant put in the chair was a ruddy-faced young man with whitish hair and a piping voice.

Rand looked at his watch and smiled. "Ready, start."

The fellow struck a high, thin note, cackled like a burning cane-brake for just thirty seconds, broke, and ended with a wheezing gasp for breath.

The onlookers were now laughing uproariously. Some were leaning back letting out big, loud haw-haws; some were bending over, hugging their knees; some were writhing in an agony of mirth. And as Rand looked at them he began to laugh.

It was the funniest sight he ever saw. And as they looked at each other and then at the solemn, round-faced, big-eyed, little-voiced young man who was still struggling for his lost laugh, they fairly went into convulsions.

Some of them gave it up and trailed off down the hall, laughing as they went. Some sat down on the floor and leaned against the wall.

But one held his ground. He was a smooth-faced, muscular fellow that looked like a trained athlete. He weighed about two hundred, but was not fat. He was laughing a round, galloping, contagious laugh that rose and fell, and rose and fell. Business got the better of Rand's amusement and he began watching the laugher critically. Five, ten, fifteen minutes, and he showed no signs of breaking.

Rand motioned for him to come to the desk. The fellow walked in, still laughing, the most natural, amused laugh in the world.

"Well?" Quick as a flash, his face was perfectly sober.

He stood before Rand.

"What is your name?"

The chap looked puzzled a moment, then smiled.

"Oh, my name — I see — Blake Moore."

"And what is your address?"

"The Walden at present."

"Can you come again Tuesday?"

"Look here, young man," he said; "what is the game? I happened to come out of my room a while ago and saw that bunch, and came down and joined in the fun. What is it you are after?"

"I beg your pardon," said Rand. "I supposed you were one of the applicants."

Then he explained that he was looking for a laugher for a show troupe.

"Not me," said Moore, shaking his head; and Rand noticed he wore a diamond pin worth a thousand or so, and knew it was not worth while making an offer.

"Well," he said, "if you ever run across a fellow, who can laugh as you can, that does want a job, send him my way, will you?"

"Sure." And Blake Moore lighted a cigarette and went out and down the hall.

After the rest had recovered sufficiently for a test, Rand selected one more possible applicant and asked him

to come again Tuesday. At a little before eight he went to the Coates House to meet guitar-players again. He expected to find an entirely different set of applicants here—respectable and educated musicians.

There was no one in the parlor reserved when he arrived, but almost immediately an attendant brought in a card. It was an ordinary visiting card:

MISS LUCILE IVES

In the corner of the card she had penciled "Guitarist."

Rand was surprised until he remembered that their advertisement had not specified the player must be a man.

He was sure Bennett would not consider a woman player at all. But—there could be harm in granting the interview.

"I'll see the young lady," he said to the attendant.

V.

"THIS is Mr. Bradshaw?" The girl hesitated.

Evidently she was as much surprised at his appearance as he was at hers.

"Yes," said Rand, who had risen. "Won't you be seated?"

He saw she was not used to seeking employment.

Miss Ives slipped into a chair and rested her guitar on the floor at her side. She was dressed in excellent taste; had smooth, white skin; an abundance of soft, wavy hair, and interesting brown eyes.

"I called in answer to your advertisement," she said hopefully. "I play the guitar."

Rand did not tell her at once that only men were wanted. Instead he asked her to play.

She certainly knew the guitar—and music besides. As she played he leaned back in a big leather chair and fairly floated away on the soft clouds of melody which she conjured from the strings.

"And can you sing?" he asked.

"Yes. I am not a professional, but I sing some." Her voice was very musical.

"And do you play other instruments?"

"The piano and violin."

She saw he liked her playing, and her face was eager with hope.

"Do you think I will do?"

"Your playing would," he answered. "But I am selecting talent for a man who is organizing a quartet—and I'm afraid he wants only men."

Keen disappointment crossed her face.

"I'm sorry." Her tone was discouraged. "I've watched the want ads in the papers for a month, and it seems as though there has been a call for everything from a blacksmith to a sleight-of-hand performer. But this was the first call for anything I can really do."

"And do you need employment?" he asked sympathetically.

"Yes, I do. I must get work of some sort quickly, even if it is nothing better than washing dishes in a restaurant."

"That would be unfortunate," he said, noticing her long, soft hands. "You do not appear suited for that sort of work."

"That is the trouble," she said frankly. "I don't seem suited to any sort of work that pays a salary." Her brows wrinkled in a thoughtful way, and she added in real distress: "One never dreams until face to face with it what an unfortunate thing it is to live for twenty-two years, learning all sorts of accomplishments—and then suddenly discover that one can't earn a living—not even board and clothes."

Rand remembered the job which he had just resigned. The Lyceum

Bureau had asked him to recommend some one to take his place—"a lady or gentlemen of culture and refinement, of pleasing personality and good address." Miss Ives certainly was that.

"But I am taking your time and keeping others waiting." She arose apologetically.

"While I am quite sure there will be no chance for you in the quartet," he said, also rising, "I have a possible position in mind. If you care to leave your address I'll call Monday morning at ten and explain it to you."

"Thank you very much," she said with new hope, and put out her hand. "You are very kind."

Instinctively she recognized him as a man of honor, and felt that he really could help her find employment.

The rest of the guitar players who applied that night were negligible. Most of them were rank amateurs, who had taken a few lessons or picked up a few fancy airs, and were crazy to get any sort of position on the stage. He did not ask any of them to call again.

Sunday, as Rand was giving his order for dinner, Bennett came in and took a chair at his table. He was perfectly groomed, and, save for his thick black hair and dark eyebrows, he looked exactly as Edgar Watson Gardner had looked not two months ago when lecturing to a crowd of five thousand at Sweet Springs.

"It is a perfect wig," thought the young man, "and a good job on the eyebrows; but it doesn't hide that nose, nor change the eyes, nor disguise the voice. It is sure E. W. G., all right."

"What luck?" asked Bennett after he had given his order.

"I've tried out quite a bunch," Rand smiled, remembering his experiences. "And I've asked three or four to come back Tuesday for you to hear."

"Very good," said Bennett. "What sort of an experience did you find it?" he asked, encouraging Rand to go into details.

Bradshaw told about the mob in the hall at the Blotter House, and described the different players.

"I asked the blond young man to come back. He really is a fine player."

But Bennett slightly shook his head.

"And how about the rest?"

When he came to Luke Basto, the dark, Spanish-looking player, Rand grew enthusiastic.

"He sure is a wonder. I am mighty anxious to have you see him."

The pupils of Bennett's eyes dilated, his thin nostrils widened.

"Yes, I want to see him." His voice was tense with eagerness. "You are sure he will come again Tuesday?" A shade of anxiety crossed his face. "It would be too bad"—he laughed, turning to his dinner—"to lose such a prize—as you describe."

"I think he will come. By the way, I suppose you want to consider only men for the place? There was a girl applied last night—several of them, in fact—but one especially that could play."

"Is that so?" said Bennett indifferently. "No, we want only men. But I believe I neglected to say so in that last advertisement. Who was the girl that could play so wonderfully?"

"Lucile Ives."

Bennett ate in silence a few moments.

"No," he remarked, "we couldn't consider a woman player, especially so young a girl as that."

"I didn't say she was young," Rand said. "She is twenty-two."

"I thought you did. Anyway, twenty-two is young—very young."

Bennett smiled. He himself was about thirty-five.

The conversation shifted, but over the dessert Bennett again casually referred to Miss Ives.

"Did she seem in need of employment?"

"Yes," replied Rand earnestly. "She was really distressed when I told

her there was no show. But I am going to try to get her my place with the Lyceum Bureau."

"That is very kind of you," said Bennett. "If you have any difficulty let me know, and I'll write them. I happen to know the manager."

"But about the laughers," Bennett asked before they left the table. "Did you engage any?"

Rand could not talk about them without laughing. He described the whole bunch, especially the big fellow who had stood in the door — Blake Moore.

"I suppose, of course," said Bennett, "you engaged him to come back?"

"No, that was the funny part. He was not an applicant—merely a guest at the hotel."

"What?" Bennett's expression quickly changed. "You failed to get him — a man that could laugh like that?"

"How could I get him?" Rand was a little nettled at the tone. "You can hardly shanghai a man for a laughing quartet."

"We must have him." Bennett spoke with quick positiveness. "Get him if you have to offer a hundred dollars a week—or more. Get him on any sort of inducements. Go now before he leaves town."

"All right," said Rand. "I'll do my best." He started at once.

Bennett followed him to the corridor:

"Get a taxicab—and hurry!"

VI.

An hour later, when Rand returned to the Baltimore, Bennett was waiting for him as he stepped out of the taxicab.

"He was gone," said the young man. "He left at noon for Denver."

"Oh, very well!" said Bennett with sudden indifference. "No doubt we can get somebody else."

An hour later Bennett came up to Rand's room.

"I have to be away a few days," he said. "I am going to leave matters solely with you. I am satisfied from what you say Luke Basto is the guitar player we want. Hire him. Then go ahead and pick out the best singer for the purpose you can find; and hire him temporarily—say for a month. Same thing with the fiddler. You'll find advertisements in the morning papers, making dates for these Wednesday."

At ten next morning Rand was at the address Miss Ives had given him. It was a refined, respectable, private boarding-house on one of the residence streets.

The girl received him in the parlor. She showed signs of worry and recent tears.

"I am so glad you came," she said unaffectedly. "Honestly, I have hardly slept for a week, worrying over what I am to do."

"When my father died two years ago," she told him during the conversation, "I thought I had plenty coming to me, and went on to school. But"—she shrugged a shoulder—"it never came. And now there is just twenty dollars between me and the wolf."

She tried to smile bravely, but it was a pathetic, worried smile.

He explained to her the work he had done.

"You simply take the folders describing and recommending the various talent — lecturers, entertainers, musicians — and call on lyceum committees in the towns where they have lecture courses, and on Chautauqua committees. You sell them a lecture or musical entertainment for a certain date, at a certain price—and you get twenty per cent.

"Sometimes when you can sell a whole winter's course to a committee, or a large bunch of talent to a Chautauqua, you make a big thing all in one day.

"And it is really very pleasant work, for you call on good people and

are always treated with consideration."

"I believe I could do it." Her eyes brightened, her face flushed excitedly. "Why, I am sure I can do that sort of work—and really like it."

When he started to leave she again held out her hand. The tears were very close to the surface in her expressive brown eyes.

"You certainly are very kind," she said, "to go to so much trouble for a stranger. If they give me the place, I'll try to justify your recommendation."

"I'll write to-day. I am sure you will get it. And then, if you wish, I will coach you on the best way to make sales."

"Thank you so much," and she pressed his hand with impulsive gratitude.

Tuesday at ten Rand went back to the Blotter House and met the blond young guitar-player and Luke Basto. He told the young blond they could not engage him, and then called in the other.

Basto looked more Spanish than ever. He was decidedly seedy in his clothes, but he was freshly shaved, perfumed, manicured, and his mustache carefully curled at the ends.

"I can use you," Rand told him directly. He thought there was a glint of satisfaction in the restless eyes, but his tone was as indifferent as ever.

"At how much per? And will the ghost walk regularly?"

"Yes," said Rand, "the ghost will walk every Saturday night. And I'll give you twenty-five a week and traveling expenses."

"All right," said Basto nonchalantly. "When do we begin?"

"Your salary will begin at once," replied Rand, pleased with his contract. "I don't know just how soon we will be on the road."

"What other musicians do you want?" asked Basto.

"A violinist—or rather a fiddler—one that plays naturally and with enthusiasm. And a good singer of ballads. You don't happen to know of any that you could recommend?"

Basto glanced restlessly round the room, fixing his eyes on Rand for a fleeting second, and then sat trying to remember.

"Let me see—I heard a fiddler in a saloon over in St. Louis a week or two ago that was just about what you want. Don't know whether Jim Green could find him or not."

"Wire him and see," said Rand. "I'll pay the bill. I am going to try out some singers to-morrow morning at the Globe Theater. If you happen to hear of one that might answer, send him around."

"Very well." Basto got up and strolled out, humming a mournful air.

"By the way," called Rand, "what is that tune you are always humming? It is a new one to me."

Basto showed his teeth in a peculiar smile.

"Oh, just an old fool song I used to hear when I was a boy. Some old English song, I think, called 'Hard-Hearted Barbara Allen.'"

The next morning Rand heard twenty or thirty singers. One, Markham Runyon, seemed almost exactly the sort of singer he thought Bennett wanted. He was about twenty-eight, strong, fiery, and with a powerful voice that was smooth and magnetic. He knew some music, but sang mostly according to his own interpretation. Rand engaged him for a month.

The violinists he met in the afternoon did not please him. He decided to wait until Basto heard from his man.

That evening he called at Miss Ives's boarding-house.

She was anxious and fearful when she came down to the parlor.

"Won't they take me?" she asked.

He handed her the telegram which told him to make a contract with her at once.

"Oh, I'm so glad, so glad!" She

flushed with pleasure. "And it has been so lovely of you to get the place for me."

"It is a pleasure to be of any service to you."

Then he went into details about the various towns in the territory he had covered; gave her the list of Lyceum committees, and advised her how to sell talent to each of them.

He returned each evening for three evenings, preparing her to start the work the next Monday. And in that time they came to know each other well. They discovered some common friends, and told each other their ambitions.

"If I should not see you again," she said at parting, "I want you to remember how grateful I am for your help."

"Oh, but you'll see me again," he laughed. "If I get my quartet going, we are almost certain to run across each other's tracks on the road."

"I hope so," she said sincerely.

Friday a long, thin, leathery-looking man appeared at Rand's room at the Baltimore. He carried a violin in a rusty case.

"I'm Henry Wilks," he said. "Luke Basto sent me."

Rand was glad to see him, and after listening to him play ten minutes signed a contract with him.

They were all supplied now but the laugher. He wondered what to do about that. Bennett had been absent all the week, and he did not know where to find him.

That evening as he went down to dinner a messenger-boy was calling:

"Rand Bradshaw! Rand Bradshaw!"

It was a telegram, and read:

> Bring what people you have signed to Denver at once.
>
> BENNETT.

VII.

RAND got his three musicians together and started at midnight for Denver.

Luke Basto and the long, leathery violin-player declined to take a sleeper. They preferred a chair-car, they said.

Rand himself did not feel sleepy and sat in the smoking-compartment for an hour or so.

Before retiring to his berth he went forward to the chair-car to suggest some music he had thought of to his players.

They were not in the chair-car, and he went on to the smoker. There were not a dozen in the car and most of them were doubled up on the seats dozing or sleeping.

Basto and the fiddler were near the end of the car quite alone. They sat facing each other, and were leaning forward in low, confidential talk. When Basto saw Rand coming down the aisle his right eyelid drooped slightly, and the fiddler quickly leaned back in his seat.

"As I was saying, Basto," he remarked in a louder tone, "that sort of music is fine, but it won't take with an audience."

Rand delivered his message and returned to the sleeper. He thought little about the sudden intimacy between Basto and the fiddler. The musical temperament is impulsive. Anyway, it was possible they had known each other before.

At Hutchison, Kansas, a messenger-boy came through the train calling for Rand Bradshaw.

It was a telegram from Bennett and simply said:

> On arrival go to the Windsor.

The morning following their arrival Rand slept late, and was awakened by the telephone in his room. He got up and answered.

"Hello! This is Bennett," said the voice. "Leave your men there and come up to the Brown Palace at ten. Room 184."

Bennett seemed in good spirits and was glad to see him, and asked him about his luck in getting recruits for the quartet.

Rand told him about signing up with Basto and securing the two others.

"I hope you will like them," he said. "They are rather peculiar fellows, but unusual musicians of that class."

"What sort of looking fellows are they?" asked Bennett. "Much of our success will depend on their stage appearance, you know."

Rand described them with his characteristic vividness. He was always a keen observer.

Bennett nodded in approval. He had followed the description with marked closeness.

"You have done well. I believe I shall be pleased with them.

"Now," he said in a businesslike tone, "get your laugher, and we will be ready to begin. Don't you know," he finished casually, "I believe the fellow you saw at Kansas City is here. I accidentally ran on to a man the other night that looked like your description of him. You might look round before we advertise and see if you can find him."

"Very well," said Rand. "By the way, when do you want to hear the fellows I have engaged?"

"Oh, any time will do. I'm sure you are a good judge. They will be all right at least for a start.

"Here is my idea of a program," and Bennett rapidly outlined his theory of a popular entertainment. And Rand admitted it was a shrewd, well-conceived program — one that could have occurred only to a man that knew audiences thoroughly.

"You work out the details," directed Bennett. "Get your musicians to work, and I'll make the dates and see to the advertising. I hope you will be ready to start on the road in two weeks."

If Rand had had a lurking notion that this was some wild show scheme doomed to failure, that notion was now dispelled. He saw readily if he could work out Bennett's plans the "Laughing Quartet" would be very popular.

"By the way," said Bennett as the young man got up to go, "I suppose you understand, of course, I am not to be known in this at all. You are to be the manager—and as far as they know, the only man interested in it."

"I understand," said Rand.

That afternoon he began the search for Blake Moore, the laugher. He hunted through the registers at all the hotels, but failed to find any Blake Moores. Then he went through places of amusement, the saloons, gambling rooms, and general loafing places.

He had hunted three days and most of three nights without getting track of him, and was about to give it up when he came face to face with Moore on Arapahoe Street about ten o'clock at night.

"Hello!" said Rand, not concealing his pleasure. "I'm glad to see you. Met you in Kansas City, you remember."

"Yes, I remember," and the big fellow began to chuckle. "You are the chap that had that laughing business."

"I am." Rand was looking at him hopefully, for he saw the diamond pin was gone and he was looking seedy. "And I'm still wanting to hire a laugher for my quartet. What is the chance to get you?"

"Oh, I don't know." Moore evidently was not so averse to employment now. "What does it come to?"

"Thirty a week and expenses," Rand offered tentatively.

Moore shook his head, but Bradshaw saw he had him; and within an hour closed a contract at thirty-five.

The next day Rand started rehearsals. It was evident from the first that Basto was to dominate the quartet. He knew more music than the others, and had a quick ear for harmony.

After the first day he really assumed control of the rehearsals, Rand only

occasionally offering suggestions. It was to be a program of melodies rather than music, and one of the big features was the laughing song, in which Blake Moore kept time with his contagious laugh for over ten minutes without a break.

"We are all ready," Rand reported in a week.

"Good work," approved Bennett. "We will try them out to-morrow night. I have arranged with the Crescent Photoplay Theater to put on our quartet from eight to nine."

Rand awaited the time with some nervousness. He felt sure the four were exceptional in their lines; but one never can tell how a thing will take with a crowd. And it was Bennett's verdict he feared.

The Crescent was a large motion-picture theater, and was packed when the Laughing Quartet went on.

They opened with Basto and his guitar—and the crowd was theirs. They closed with the laughing song, and the people rocked in their seats and cheered and applauded until their hands—and feet—were sore.

After the curtain had gone down and the lights turned on Rand looked round and saw Bennett not five seats away. His thin nostrils were distended, the pupils of his eyes dilated, and the veins in his neck stood out.

He showed no signs of recognizing Rand, but as he passed him going out said in a low tone:

"The Brown Palace at twelve to-night."

VIII.

At midnight Rand was at the Brown Palace and went up to room 184. He tapped lightly on the door.

"Come in."

He entered and found Bennett sitting by an open window looking out toward the mountains. Outwardly he was very calm, but intense, subdued excitement showed in his eyes.

"That was fine," he said. "Great! You are to start on the road at once. I've already made a date for you at Boulder.

"You have got three that exactly fill the bill. The singer you will change as soon as you find a better. When you get the singer that suits me your year's salary will be earned. Maybe when you get on the road and get well acquainted, Basto can help you find the right singer. Take his judgment on it. If he suggests a singer, get him.

"In the mean time I want you to go with them on the road. Be one with them—stay right with them, keep on the closest possible terms."

He was speaking with emphasis, but suddenly smiled and changed to a lighter tone: "For you know the musical temperament is variable. That bunch is too valuable to lose. Listen to everything they say. Let nothing escape you, so that if they are getting restless or dissatisfied you will know how to deal with them.

"But whatever you do, don't let any of them quit you. Wire me if there is any trouble."

Wednesday they arrived in Boulder for their first date. They found the Laughing Quartet had been thoroughly and effectively billed. The opera-house that night was filled, and the entertainment made a big hit.

Their next date was at Loveland. Already Rand noticed the singer was not going to take well with the rest of the company. Basto, Moore, and the fiddler were together at the station, in the car, and at the hotel. The singer went alone.

Sunday they spent at Greeley. The singer seemed so much alone that Rand volunteered to take a walk with him. He said little about the rest, except after they had walked two or three miles he remarked:

"Those fellows seem to have it in for me. I don't think I'm going to take very well with them. They're a queer bunch."

That afternoon Rand got a message to start East. A line of towns

through Kansas and Missouri had been billed.

At first Rand had noticed Basto and the other two had held aloof from him—they were polite, even deferential, but not confidential. They seemed to watch him as though they expected he would disappear with the weekly pay-roll. But in a few days seemed to concede he was all right, and talked to him and before him freely.

They had returned through Denver and were working East on the Santa Fe. When they reached Garden City the singer got Rand to one side.

"Say, I don't want to break my contract, but I don't really believe I can stick it out with this bunch."

"Why, what is the matter?"

"Oh," he answered evasively, "I—well, they don't suit me. How soon do you think you can get somebody in my place?"

"I don't know, but I will try if you wish."

That evening after the program Rand remarked to Basto:

"Our friend Runyon wants to quit. Do you know of anybody that could take his place?"

Basto did not; but he would consult the others. Among them they happened to remember a fellow named Steve Shumate at Chicago that might serve.

Rand took up the matter with Shumate by wire and hired him. He was to join them at Newton three days later.

Runyon was manifestly relieved when they found Shumate at Newton waiting, and he could quit the company.

Shumate was a round, pink-faced fellow with big, innocent, blue eyes, and a voice finely adapted to the programs they rendered.

It seemed that all three had met Shumate before, and they held a jollification in Basto's room. They came so near getting drunk that Rand gave them a severe warning next morning. Irregular conduct will ruin the reputation of a lyceum attraction quickly, for news on the road travels fast.

At Chanute, as Rand registered at the hotel for the company, his eyes caught a name on the page that gave his heart several extra beats.

He watched for Miss Ives at noon, and when they met she was as delighted as he was. They spent most of the afternoon driving about town, and telling each other about their experiences.

The work had gone against the grain with Miss Ives, but she was plucky and was making a fair success. Rand was glad and congratulated her, but he could not help feeling sorry that a girl of her accomplishments and charm should be compelled to earn her living at distasteful work.

"I have heard a great deal about your company," she said. "I must hear it this evening. My train does not leave until eleven."

"I'm anxious to have you to hear it. I want you to see the aggregation I have got together. I'll get you a good seat."

Rand always stayed at the door until the program was under way, and then usually took a seat in the rear of the hall and listened critically. He was always suggesting improvements.

Tickets were selling rapidly. The opera-house was nearly full. Rand had just passed Miss Ives into a seat he had reserved. It was time for the curtain to go up. There was an impatient clapping in front. Something was causing a delay.

Rand was about to go to the front to see what was the trouble when Blake Moore came out to the ticket-office.

"We are in the dickens of a shape," he said to Rand in distress. "Basto is sick—can't possibly play."

Rand returned hurriedly with him.

Basto had gone, they told him—gone to a doctor. No chance for a program to-night.

Rand fumed a moment. There was

a two-hundred-dollar house. Then, on inspiration he remembered Miss Ives.

Returning to the front, he sent a messenger down the aisle for her, and explained the situation.

"I'll do my best for you," she said cheerfully. She knew most of the selections that were played in connection with the others. She could substitute solos of her own.

"I will be awfully thankful," said Rand, relieved, "and it will mean fifty dollars to you."

The program went through with almost the usual vim. There was as much applause as usual, only Rand noticed it was of a different quality—more refined and musical applause.

After the program he went with her to her train. Instead of being delighted with her success, and the fee, she seemed uneasy and in doubt.

"Mr. Bradshaw," she said, turning to him with sudden impulse just before she boarded the train, "I wish you would get away from this company."

"Why?" he asked in astonishment.

"I can't hardly say—only I heard things back there— I—I don't believe if I were you—I'd stay—I wish you would quit right away."

The bell was ringing and there was no time for further explanation.

"I'll see you at Ottawa Friday," he said. "We'll talk it over there."

"Good-by"—she held his hand a moment as though protectingly. "Don't wait until Friday—to quit," she said anxiously, and stepped on board the car.

IX.

RAND started back to the hotel disturbed. Of course it was out of the question for him to give up the quartet. He was merely waiting word from Bennett, for he was sure the company would suit him now, and he would get his twenty-four hundred dollars.

But what did the girl mean? What had she heard behind the scenes? He was certain Miss Ives was not one to give a warning of that sort without some substantial reason.

He went up to Basto's room to inquire how he felt. Basto and Blake Moore always roomed together.

There was no light in the room, and no response when he tapped on the door. He went to the room occupied by the other two players.

The door was open, and both Shumate and Wilks were lounging in their chairs smoking.

"How is Basto?" asked Rand.

"Don't know," said Shumate. "He had not come back from the doctor's when the show was out, and Moore went after him. They haven't come in yet."

They did not seem anxious for him to stay, so he went to his own room, farther down the hall. He did not undress, but lay down across the bed, leaving his door open an inch or two.

From where he lay he could see through the crack down the hall, dimly lighted by one gas-jet at the head of the stairs.

In about an hour Basto and Moore came up the stairs, walking softly so as not to disturb the sleepers, for it was after midnight. Basto still appeared sick, for Moore was lifting him along by the arm. But as they came to the door of their room Basto straightened up, and Rand saw two rows of white teeth as his lips parted in a grin.

They all slept late next morning, and at nine o'clock were hurrying to get ready for their train.

Rand was waiting in the office, getting nervous, for they had to catch that train or miss their connections. They had only a few minutes to spare, and he ran up the stairs to hurry them.

All were ready but Basto, and at last he came out, his guitar-case in one hand, trying to button his collar with the other.

He set down the guitar and stopped to take both hands to the collar.

"Here, let me help you." Rand reached for the guitar. Basto jumped and started to pick it up himself, but Rand had it first, and started.

"Come on," he called.

The weight of the guitar had given him a jolt. He turned with an air of assumed severity.

"Now, look here," he said, "you fellows have been interviewing a bootlegger again. There is at least a half-dozen bottles of beer in this guitar-box."

They all laughed, and Basto put on a guilty, penitent look. "We'll touch it lightly, Mr. Bradshaw, and won't let anybody see."

But Rand knew it was not beer.

At their next stop he engaged rooms for the four on the second floor; one for himself on the first.

Two hours later, when the players were out in town, Rand went to the clerk and asked to be transferred to the room adjoining Basto's and Moore's.

"I am sorry," said the clerk, "but the gentlemen in fourteen asked to be transferred to that room an hour ago."

They had to leave at three o'clock next morning for a pretty long jump. The four declined a sleeper for the rest of the night. They would sit up and have a game of cards, they said.

Rand decided to take a berth and finish his sleep. After the four had entered the smoking-car he went back to the first sleeper and handed the porter his grip. The train changed engines here, and there was a few minutes' wait.

He sauntered down the platform. There were three Pullmans, as it was a through train. The bell began to ring, and just as Rand started to turn back to his car a man hurried from around the end of the depot, grip in hand, and swung up on the steps of the last sleeper. For just an instant his face was turned toward the light.

It was Bennett.

"Well, I'll be durned!" said Rand to himself. "This situation is getting a little bit peculiar."

They played at Salina the next night.

After the entertainment closed, instead of going direct to the hotel, Rand waited for the players. The opera-house was empty, but they still had not come down.

He went up back of the scenes.

"Well, what's up now, captain?" Blake Moore met him in the right wing, and swore irritably.

"Aren't you fellows coming on to the hotel?" Rand asked.

"No, not now," said Moore. "Don't you think we might possibly find the way without a chaperon? Fact is, we are invited to a little supper by some local musicians—Chapman's Café."

Rand went to the hotel, but not to bed. After an hour's wait he went down the street to Chapman's Café. There were a half-dozen local musicians really giving a supper—to Basto and Wilks.

Shumate and Moore were not there.

X.

It was about one o'clock when they came in. Rand was in bed but not asleep. The four were together, and all went to Basto's room, which joined Rand's, and talked in low tones for a half-hour or so.

At two that afternoon they reached Ottawa. Rand quickly disposed of his quartet and went to look for Miss Lucile Ives, who was to be in Ottawa that day.

He found her in the parlor of the hotel curled up in a chair, most wofully dejected. She brightened, manifestly glad and relieved to see him.

"I've been worrying a good deal about you," she said, "and blaming myself for not telling you more at

Chanute. I was just about to write you, for I knew you would not quit." She smiled, but there was grave anxiety in her eyes.

"What was it you heard that made you think I ought to leave the company?" he asked.

"I can hardly tell you," she replied, puzzling. "It was nothing definite, except a thing or two I saw—and that would not amount to much if it were not for a sort of feeling or atmosphere that went with it."

"They did not insult you or anything of that sort?" he said with sudden heat.

"No—oh, no. They were very polite—too polite. What I saw and heard was simply this:

"After the second number when I left the stage, and the three came out for a costume-song, I went into the left wing. They had changed clothes hurriedly, and there were visible three very ugly revolvers. And a grip which had been hastily closed had not fastened and was partly open.

"In it were things that do not belong to a lyceum quartet.

"And while Shumate was singing, Moore and Wilks were standing just around a prop at the back of the stage and did not see me.

"'Do you think he is on?' asked Shumate. 'No,' said Moore, 'he's as innocent as a suckling babe.' 'Well, if he catches on to anything,' said Shumate, 'it'll be fatal—to him.'"

"They might have been joking about something," said Rand, trying to make light of it.

"Yes," she said doubtfully, "but I felt they were not and meant you. I wish you would leave them, Mr. Bradshaw." She suddenly looked at him pleadingly. "Take your old job. I'll resign it right now. I'm making rather a mess of it, anyway. I haven't sold a single lecture or entertainment for a week.

"You take it back, and let the quartet go. I'll get something else to do—I can wash dishes, you know."

She smiled a brave but forlorn smile.

"Now don't you worry about me," he said reassuringly. But he felt happy that she did worry about him. "And you go on with your work. Luck will turn. I know you can succeed."

They changed the subject to pleasanter things than danger and daily bread, and went for a drive out by the university and off along the country road between fields of tender young wheat.

As she was still worried about his connection with the quartet when she boarded the seven o'clock train, he promised to write her every day.

Just as the curtain went up that night a message was brought to Rand.

> Date at Olathe canceled. Go to Kincaid to-morrow. Play there at night.
>
> BENNETT.

Rand was surprised. A change of dates was occasionally necessary, but he had expected a big house at Olathe. He had never heard of Kincaid.

He went to the manager of the opera-house at the ticket-window.

"Where is Kincaid?" he asked.

"Northwest," he replied. "At the end of a little branch-line about fifty miles from nowhere."

He did not mention the change of plan until the quartet was ready to board the train at nine the next morning.

"I thought we were going the other way," said Moore.

"We were," replied Rand, "but the date at Olathe has been canceled. We go to Kincaid."

"Where and what is Kincaid?" Basto turned on him suddenly, dark and scowling.

"Hanged if I know," answered Rand indifferently. "All I know is our advance man has billed us there for to-night."

The company exchanged significant glances. Rand did not know whether

it was of anger, suspicion, or relief. Anyway, they were shortly in good spirits, and were making light of their excursion into the short-grass country.

They reached Kincaid at two o'clock and found it a bleak little prairie town of about seven hundred. Rand had also discovered there was but one train a day—and it did not run on Sunday. As this was Saturday, it meant they were to stay there until noon Monday. But he did not mention this to the company.

But if the town was small, the audience was not. The Laughing Quartet had been widely heralded and every reserve seat was sold long before six o'clock. At eight standing room was in demand. Practically every man, woman, and child in the town and scores from the country were packed into the opera-house.

Rand collected tickets at the door. The curtain went up at eight. All four came on for the first number. Then Moore and Basto did a stunt, and Rand knew they had changed the program.

These two continued to play and laugh for nearly a half-hour, and Rand began to wonder what had happened to the other two.

But just then the program changed, and Shumate and Wilks came on for a song with violin accompaniment. Then they gave a solo apiece, and came back together. They answered an encore, and each came in for another solo.

The audience was pleased, but Rand was getting mad. Why were they butchering the program like that? Where was the laughing song and their other effective quartet selections?

For half an hour—three-quarters, almost an hour, these two continued to entertain the audience.

Rand left the front door and went round to the outside entrance to the stage. For once he was thoroughly mad and was determined to raise thunder with them.

He came on the stage and began to look behind the scenes for the absent Basto and Moore. They were not in sight. He lifted a curtain that shut off one corner as a dressing-room.

Two coats and a pair or two of trousers were carelessly thrown on the floor—over an old meal-sack.

He stooped and curiously drew out the old sack, opened it, and looked in.

There were more than a half-bushel of packages of greenbacks.

XI.

RAND hastily shoved the sack of bills back in the corner, dropped the coats over it, and started to slip out.

As he did so he heard the opening of the laughing song. The four were at last all on the stage.

He was back in the front before the song closed, and looked about a little fearfully to see if any one appeared to have noticed his absence. Among the crowd standing at the back of the hall he saw—Edgar Watson Gardner. The black wig and dark eyebrows that marked him as Bennett were gone.

A sudden rage filled Rand. What a dupe he had been. He saw, or thought he saw, the whole plot. But there was nothing to do but sit tight and trust to luck. If they were caught with the goods, no jury in the world would believe him innocent.

When the entertainment closed Rand started to the hotel alone. He expected to hear that the bank or some big store was robbed; expected every minute to see an excited crowd begin to gather. But there was no stir, no sound but of chatting, laughing people.

He waited in the office until the quartet came in. Moore was carrying Basto's violin-case.

They all stood round the clerk's desk joking and laughing with two or three traveling men and a few natives who had dropped in to get a word with the famous musicians.

Directly Basto stepped up to Rand.

"What time do we get out in the morning?"

"Not until Monday," said Rand curtly. "No train."

"But there are automobiles. We can hire one of them to take us to the main line," suggested Basto amiably.

"We'll see about it," said Rand.

Really he would be glad to get out. Every minute now he was expecting to hear the sound of excitement break out on the streets. Surely there had been a robbery and it would be discovered before morning.

At eleven they went to their rooms. Rand's room was next to Basto and Moore's. There was a door that opened between them—and it opened on their side.

Rand did not undress, but took off his shoes and made a noise as though getting ready for bed.

The four were all in the adjoining room. He heard them talking and laughing. He slipped to the door and peeped through the keyhole.

They were openly and hilariously stowing away the bills in secret linings of the violin and guitar cases.

In a little while there was stillness in the room, and Rand guessed they were listening to see if he were asleep. He crept to the bed, stretched himself upon it, and began to snore, evenly and with gradually increasing loudness.

Then the voices began again, subdued this time.

At last they got still. Rand slipped to the door between and saw the room was dark. Doubtless they had gone to bed. Then he went to the window and sat down on the floor with his elbows on the ledge, to think.

If the robbery should be detected and the company caught, it meant prison and disgrace for him. He thought of Lucile Ives—and wondered if she, too, would believe him guilty.

Suddenly his heart gave a jump and then pounded until the blood roared in his head. Below he saw dark forms slipping round the hotel. The robbery was discovered and they were surrounding the house.

The first clear thought that came to him was that he must not be caught dressed and watching.

He slipped out of his clothes and got into bed without any noise and waited with choking dread the coming of the officers.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed and there was no foot on the stairs, no sound in the hall.

Then the door into the adjoining room opened very, very softly, an inch at a time.

Rand began to snore. Two men slipped in, and he heard Basto say:

"He's sound asleep."

"You sure he knows?" asked Moore, a little reluctant.

"Dead sure. He's been suspicious and he got onto us straight to-night. As I went on to the stage I saw him slip into the dressing-room. There is no other way. Put the gun right close to his forehead, and drop it the minute you press the trigger. The suicide note will make it a safe getaway for us."

The cold sweat stood out all over Rand. His spine felt like ice, his head like fire. He could not stir nor make a sound. They were going to kill him and make it appear as a suicide.

So great was the horror, so near was death, that he could not move nor cry out—but only lay still and pretend to be asleep, while they crept in their stocking-feet toward the bed.

XII.

THE two assassins were nearly to the bed. Rand's paralysis of fear swiftly passed. He would fight for his life. He would continue his apparent sleep until Moore bent over to put the pistol to his head. Then with a spring he would seize the pistol and grapple for his life.

They were stepping with great caution. One more step and they would be at his bedside.

There was a noise on the stairs, and a firm, unconcerned step came down the hall.

The two assassins paused a second,

then hastily slipped back to their own room and closed the door.

The man in the hall stopped at Rand's door and gave a resounding knock.

Rand yawned loudly as if awakening from a sound sleep; but wasted precious few seconds in getting to the door.

When he opened it Bennett—or rather Edgar Watson Gardner—stood before him, and with a warning signal handed him a revolver. Then he asked in a loud, bluff voice:

"Are you the feller that manages this quartet?'

"Yes," replied Rand.

"I heard," continued Bennett in a loud tone, "you fellers wanted to get back to the main line of the Santa Fe before Monday. I've got an automobile, and there's a traveling man here that has to get there in time for the six o'clock train.

"If you fellers want to go I can take you along for a dollar apiece."

"I'll see," said Rand.

He knocked on Basto and Moore's door.

After a few minutes there was a sleepy answer.

Rand called through the door the automobile proposition.

They wanted to go, and would get ready soon.

In ten or fifteen minutes the four came down yawning and joking about being sleepy.

They stepped into the dimly lighted office and were instantly covered by a half-dozen guns.

They were handcuffed and left under a heavy guard in the office.

Bennett and Rand went up to the young man's room. They would not start with the burglars until daylight.

"I guess," said Gardner, his keen blue eyes sparkling, "this thing has been rather a puzzle to you all along."

"Yes," said Rand, "it has been a whole rebus. It came nearly being a funeral."

"There was some danger in it," admitted Gardner. "But I've watched mighty close. I haven't been far away more than a few hours at a time, except when I followed Moore to Denver, since we first met in Springfield.

"To explain," he said, "I'll have to give you a little personal history. My name is not Bennett."

"No," said Rand, "it is Edgar Watson Gardner. I knew you from the first."

"Even that," he smiled, "is only my lecture and pen name. My real name is Martin Dunnegan.

"While in college I made quite a reputation as an orator. Even when I graduated at twenty-four I thought of going on the lecture platform.

"But when I returned to my home town in Illinois I was offered a position in the Citizens' Bank. I took it, soon became cashier, and held that job for three years.

"Just off the president's office in the back part of the bank building a room was fitted up in which I slept, both as a saving to me and a protection to the bank. However," he laughed, "I was not much protection to the bank, for I slept like one dead. No blaring brass band, no thunder-storm, even the booming of a cannon will not wake me when in sound sleep.

"But there is one peculiarity about it. Sound as I sleep I am conscious of human voices round me, and often what is going on or what is said enters into my dreams.

"Well, one night in November there was an entertainment at the opera-house by a male quartet which I enjoyed very much.

"About eleven I went to my bed in the bank and dropped into my usual deep sleep.

"In the night I dreamed two men were in the front part of the bank driving nails into a piece of boiler-plate, and as they worked one of them hummed under his breath 'Hard-Hearted Barbara Allen,' and the other occasionally laughed a low, running

laugh. I knew them—they were two members of the quartet that I had heard that night.

"The next morning I was fairly shaken awake by the bookkeeper, who had come down early.

"The safe had been blown open, the bank robbed. It was just at the time of our heaviest fall collections, and sixty thousand dollars had been taken from the safe.

"There was no insurance, and the loss caused the bank to close its doors. Heavy rewards were offered; but the officers and detectives never found a trace of the robbers.

"That I could sleep while a safe was being dynamited was not believed by the angry depositors. While I was not arrested, it was freely discussed that I was a partner in the robbery; and I was watched for months.

"I was so hurt and disgraced that I changed my name, and, as you know, made a success on the lecture platform.

"Now I did not tell my dream to any one. I did not believe it would do any good. I knew even if my suspicions were right the stolen money would never be recovered. And if there was any reward paid I did not want it to go to detectives and deputy sheriffs.

"I wanted to get it—to turn over to the man that suffered all the loss. The president made good to all the depositors, but I learned later when he died they found he had mortgaged everything he had to the last dollar.

"From the first I began to work on the theory that the quartet was a talented band of robbers. They traveled under highly respectable guise, did a robbery in the night, and carried away the booty in their musical instruments, without the slightest suspicion.

"I began to investigate and found they had been in two other towns on nights when robberies had occurred.

"They disbanded a month later—and I have watched for them to reappear ever since.

"This summer I guessed they had about made way with their haul, and would be ready for another round. I started out to find them, but decided to put you on the job.

"And you certainly did your work well.

"Since you have been with them they have done two other light robberies besides this one of the bank tonight.

"Their conviction will clear my own name.

"There are rewards still outstanding for this gang aggregating forty thousand dollars.

"I am going to give you five thousand of it, and turn the rest over to President Ives's estate."

"Ives!" Rand exclaimed.

"Yes—Miss Lucile Ives, I believe, is the only heir. By the way, I believe you know her. We must get word to her. Do you know where she is?"

"No," said Rand, getting up jubilantly, "but I shall find her in just about twenty-four hours—or less."

TO ——

Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory—
Odors, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.
Rose-leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heaped for the belov'd's bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone
Love itself shall slumber on.

Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Putting the Punch in Art

by George T. Pardy

I MET Algernon Vaudray when the bleak December winds were blowing and the air thick with snowflakes. As I shook hands I saw that he wore no overcoat and his lips were blue with cold.

Whirling him around, I directed our steps to a neighboring restaurant, where he thawed out with a cup of coffee and remarked that it was a fine, bracing day.

Also, he dwelt upon the regrettable tendency of people to muffle themselves up instead of benefiting by the health-giving properties of the keen atmosphere.

"Now, that's all," I said with brutal frankness. "I know your benny is in hock. Don't hand me anything coarse, Algy."

He colored and muttered something uncomplimentary, but didn't feeze me. I haven't much patience with the high-class poet breed Algy belongs to. Only I admit he has genius, though he does not make the proper use of it.

"Been writing anything lately?" I asked.

"Nothing that you'd be able to appreciate," he returned with cold hauteur.

Touchy, you see, like all of his kind; but, Lord, a chap running a big advertising agency isn't to be bluffed by a chilly answer.

I repeated my question, and he reluctantly drew out a clipping and handed it to me.

I ran over it hastily. It was the same sort of dreary muck Algy had been scribbling and starving on for a year back. The last verse will do for a specimen:

> Dear, we have drunk our fill of Lethe's stream,
> Memory's reproachful, pallid ghosts have fled,
> Wan specters of the past: this golden hour
> Doth hold our lives' atonement; would that we
> Could pass forever from the paths of men,
> Drifting on waves of silence languidly
> Through dusky shadows to the shores of death.

"How much?" I asked.

"*Mangleton's Magazine* paid me

four dollars for it," he responded sulkily.

I whistled.

"Rip me off a few lively, jingly lines booming Saffron Soap, and I'll give you twenty-five for, say, six verses," I said. "How about it?"

He flashed a glance at me which ought to have scorched my inmost soul—if I was easily scorched, but I am not.

"There's no use in arguing with a mere Philistine," he snorted haughtily. "But, once and for all, Ballard, understand that I refuse to prostitute my art."

Thereupon I resolved to change the subject.

"How's your girl?" I inquired.

He worked the scorching racket again, but I didn't flinch.

"If," he said finally, "you happen to be referring to my *fiancée*, Miss Julia Avery, she is enjoying excellent health, thank you."

"Is she still in the painting biz?" I asked.

"She is still pursuing her vocation as an artist," he responded coldly.

"I wonder if she'd do me a couple of posters for the Mohawk Baking Powder people?" I mused aloud, unmindful of Algy's pained expression.

"Decidedly not," he declared indignantly. "Miss Avery is not a commercial dauber."

All the same, I looked up Miss Avery that same afternoon. She was a fine, big, handsome girl, fairly throwing herself away, in my opinion, on such a shiftless creature as a decadent poet, when there were plenty of practical fellows, good money-makers, able and willing to provide her with a decent home.

I told her I had seen Algy, and how he balked over the notion of either of them gathering in mazuma at the expense of his esthetic feelings.

She sighed.

"Sometimes," she said, "I wish Algy's feelings were not quite so intense. To be frank with you, Mr. Ballard, I see no chance of us getting married so long as things are in their present state."

"Then you'll do the posters?" I queried triumphantly.

She shook her head. "I love Algy, Mr. Ballard," she replied, "and I'm afraid he'd never forgive me if I did. He would consider it utterly beneath me."

"Now see here, Miss Avery," I said, "let's try to get around this somehow. You know Gerald Thompson?"

"The hack rimer?" she queried. "Yes, I know him. I dislike him and so does Algy."

"There's the point," I said. "Supposing you forget your dislike for a while and admire him and his verses instead."

Miss Avery smiled. "You think that Algy—"

"Would be jealous," I broke in, "and we might induce him to try to beat Thompson at his own game. Then you could go on with poster work and first thing you know you'd both have money to burn."

Miss Avery was a smart girl and it didn't take her long to agree to my plan. A week later I gave a little dinner at my place and got together a crowd of literary and artistic folks.

None of 'em were too proud to come, for the Ballard Advertising Agency has more of a pull in Bohemian circles than you'd imagine. Miss Avery and Algy were present, and, of course, Mr. Gerald Thompson, who is a stout, hustling kind of party with bright red hair.

There were all sorts of doings, readings by rising authors from their own writings, musical selections, and so on. Algy was called on and recited one of his recent poems.

It was a beautifully tearful stunt entitled "Love's Threnody," full of melancholy gush about busted hearts, "purple passion flowers of a world's desire," and such wailful junk.

I don't believe anybody knew just what it meant, but they applauded him all right. Only Miss Avery didn't en-

thuse very much, and I could see that Algy was a bit taken aback by her coldness.

But when Gerald Thompson toed the scratch and at my request spoke the piece he had composed for the new Mohawk Baking Powder ad, Miss Avery thanked him with tears in her eyes.

She said it was the finest thing she had heard in years and admired one verse in particular so much that Thompson had to write it down for her.

It was the wind-up of the poem and ran like this:

> Throughout the world its praises ring,
> Of baking powders, 'tis the king,
> And puts a crimp in all the rest,
> The Mohawk brand is sure the best.

I didn't see Algy for several days. Then one afternoon he showed up at my office looking mighty limp and dejected.

"Ballard," he said with a groan, "what kind of a spell has this infernal Thompson cast over my Julia—Miss Avery? Since that confounded dinner of yours, she's simply raving over that red-headed fool and his driveling rot. My heart is broken."

"Heart nothing," I told him. "It's your perspective that's wrong; your vision isn't accurate. You're out of touch with the century and see things from a decaying standpoint. Thompson's a rising young genius and he's got the tone of the age he lives in, that's all."

Algy sank into a chair and sighed. "Commercialism," he wailed, "is ringing the death-knell of art."

"The joybells of art, you mean," I said. "Why, art is only just beginning to wake up and getting ready for a good time. All this decadent rot that your brain-cells are loaded up with don't go with the public any more.

"Purple passion flowers are out of the decorative schemes nowadays, and quaffing drafts from Lethe's stream ain't one, two, three with imbibing good lager. Get started and tear off something worth while, if you don't want to be classed with the literary also-rans. Have you seen Miss Avery's Mohawk posters?"

"Miss Avery's *what?*" he yelled, jumping up.

I reached into my desk and switched them out—two nobby posters, one showing a beautiful woman with a lovely set of teeth smiling all over her face as she used a can of Mohawk Baking Powder to make a batch of cakes.

The other showed a distressed dame weeping over her pastry which had been ruined by using baking powder out of a can marked—"Rival to Mohawk's."

I thought Algy's under jaw would have fallen right down and broke on the floor at his feet when he saw those two gems of art with Miss Avery's signature attached to them. He stood silent a while, staring with bulged-out eyes. Then he suddenly straightened up and shut his teeth together with a snap.

"My Julia did—that—" he said very slowly, "to illustrate that red-headed swine's low-down jingles!"

I didn't say a word but just stood watching him and letting the truth soak into his system. At last he turned to me with a determined look—the look of a man that's made his mind up to some desperate action.

"Ballard," he said, "you've shattered my dreams of art for art's sake irretrievably, but I believe you want to be my friend. Will you give me a chance to write something on the Mohawk brand? I'll certainly make good and show that red-headed Thompson he isn't the only baking-powder poet in the market."

"You're on, Algy, go to it," I said, and he went away.

Next morning he came to bat with a poem that beat Thompson's piece all hollow. It had a majestic swing to it that made you think of a grand army marching with trumpets blowing and

flags a flying. These were two of the bulliest verses:

Beyond the ken of the sons of men in outer darkness hurled
Lie empty cans and ruined pans—the débris of a world;
The cakes they made were of vilest grade, and the housewife's heart was sore
Till the Mohawk Powder came to soothe the grief she knows no more.

They are lying back on the beaten track—the rivals whom we knew;
How vain their hope to strive and cope with quality so true!
Up to the skies glad shouts arise in praise of the Mohawk brand—
The great domestic potentate who rules our glorious land.

Do you know what was my first emotion when I perused those thrilling lines? Pride, sir, rank, undiluted pride, to think that I, Bob Ballard, had brought to the front a genuine, practical poet capable of giving weight and a licking to any verse monger in the universe, bar none; a poet whose flights of inspiration would make Shakespeare, Milton, Longfellow, Tennyson, Poe, and all those ancient fossils look like deuce spots.

There wasn't one of them in Algy Vaudray's class—that's my unbiased opinion, the opinion of a man who knows good literature when he sees it. As soon as I could gather myself together I sat down, wrote out a check for a hundred and handed it to him.

"Take this as a small token of my regard, my boy," I said. "You've done the trick at last and copped the championship belt. That's the right kind of poetry, the sort that combines melody and instruction, the kind that appeals to the great American people, the kind they can read when traveling in the subway and surface cars and appreciate.

"The seat of their emotions is in the stomach, Algy, not the heart, remember that. All you've got to do is cut out the purple passion flowers and Lethe spiels forevermore, keep on turning up masterpieces like this and prosper. Julia and you can make a team calculated to break all track records, and keep the other Pegasuses and color splashers faded forty ways from the jack."

Algernon took my advice. He's the laureate of the advertising world now, married to Julia, who illustrates all his verses, and they're both simply coining money.

Algy's success goes to prove what I've always maintained, that all poets aren't mere lunatics. There's solid sense lying dormant in some of 'em, if you can only dig down deep enough to locate it.

TO DAISIES, NOT TO SHUT TOO SOON.

SHUT not so soon; the dull-eyed night
Has not as yet begun
To make a seizure on the light,
Or to seal up the sun.

No marigolds yet closed are,
No shadows great appear;
Nor doth the early shepherd's star
Shine like a spangle here.

Stay but till my Julia close
Her life begetting eye,
And let the whole world then dispose
Itself to live or die.

Robert Herrick.

The Log-Book

By the Editor

THE window forninst which my typewriter is placed is nineteen stories above the square. Hence, as behooves an editor, I may assume a very Jovian attitude toward the *animalcula* that scurry round below.

The horses viewed from above look more or less like stubby animated cigars; the new-fangled street-cars like gigantic buff caterpillars; the men are only straw hats with feet appearing and disappearing beneath them; the women mere spots of color.

There are hundreds of these spots and hats sitting round in the summer shade in the square below. The square still looks very beautiful because the city has not yet had a chance to drench it in dust and smoke. It is to be hoped that every one, or at least every two of the spots and hats are engaged in reading THE ARGOSY.

J. Earl Clauson and Simeon Russ and the others are fine park companions for this sort of an afternoon. I don't mean by this that they are in the habit of holding down park benches—first, because they aren't that sort, and secondly, because—as every one knows—the only park that an author sits in is his own private affair which he has had constructed from the proceeds of his popularity.

Nevertheless, "Nobody Loves a Loser" and "A Smiling Nemesis" are good reading for this season.

Or for any season.

The alleged "seasonable reading" theory has always annoyed me. Why—for instance—must we read of cold things in July and hot things in January? Why must our summer fictional pap be more frothy than our winter reading?

It doesn't seem reasonable that when we break out with straw hats and low shoes and flannels we must immediately consume nothing but light-weight stories. A good story is a good story whether we read it in a hammock or in an igloo.

Going on the theory that in hot weather one must read stories that are very light or that don't deal with hot things, and that in the winter one may permit oneself to be serious, but must not read anything about polar expeditions—think how brutal the effect on other portions of the globe. Folks who live in the north where it is so much of the time cold—in Alaska, in Poland, in Russia, in Sweden and so on—would really never legitimately get a chance at light reading and would never—or seldom—read stories that weren't laid in close proximity to the tropics.

To reverse it—the Italians and Spanish and Greeks and Venezuelans and such, those who live anywhere near the equator, would generally be debarred from reading anything except arctic expedition yarns and the very frothiest of stuff. Of course, I suppose they might make occasional trips to the temperate zones when they wanted to change their literary diet.

I cannot understand why a good story isn't a good story all the year through from January the first to December the thirty-first and then some.

So, unless I am overwhelmed by a storm of howls, THE ARGOSY is going to have good stories in it—regardless of the time of year. Sometimes you may get the most frigid and antarctic yarn on the coldest day in January, and again on the fifteenth of some July you may be presented with a story that by contrast will make Vesuvius look like an iceberg.

Don't worry yet, however. Next month's book-length novel is in every way legitimate. By that I mean that it will entertain you like a streak and will not hurt your sensibilities by making you perspire too much or overheat your gray-matter.

THE LAST OF THE DUANES

is a hummer.

It's an out in the open story—as doubtless you all know who know Mr. Grey. It's a young man's story, and yet — I think it's a woman's story too —for the young chap is such a corker — so honest — so unfortunate—so up against it.

It is agreeable for all of us to read stories about young people who are distinctly up against it—when we know that things are coming out all right. And they do in this story and more.

To escape being vague let it be added that the story is laid in Texas in old battling days. You will meet up with a throng of bad men, some good ones, a stunning heroine, and a real natural hero.

THE EMERALD BELL

is the novelette to come out next month. It's by George Brydges Rodney and has that fine military flavor that always makes Captain Rodney's stories so engrossing.

Again, it has somewhat to do with present day Mexican situation, and, though we do not necessarily offer this last as an extra inducement, yet the story may, for that reason, appeal the more to some.

It's exciting from the letter "T" in the title.

Then there will be also a full line of the right sort of short stories—and so, until next month, "*Addio.*"

Here are some other folks who have things to say and who are doubtless more entertaining than I.

FROM THE ADMIRAL'S DESPATCH BAG

Silence and Knockers

EDITOR, THE ARGOSY:

Put me down as another booster for Fred Jackson. Keep up the good work and let THE ARGOSY stay as she is. You don't have to wait a month for the next story, and if you miss a number no harm is done.

Out in this country we don't always make connections with the news-stand and perhaps lose out. Who is the captain of your ship? Your first puff is all O. K., and have no objections to the rest as I'm in the first watch.

Tell some of those Jackson knockers to haul into a safe port and moor fore and aft.

Have you not more silence than knockers for your judgment? And what does it generally mean?

R. E. T.

U. S. S. Helena, *en route* to Hankow from Shanghai.

A Little Tip

EDITOR, THE ARGOSY:

As I have seen no letters from western Kansas, I take my pen in hand, *et cetera*. Here are my likes and dislikes, also a few valuable (?) suggestions:

Bedford-Jones's stories are fine, although I do not think the literary workmanship in the first of the "Solomon" stories is quite so good as that in the

"Waters of Strife." However, am eagerly awaiting the second story in the trilogy.

Katharine Eggleston's stories I do not like very well. The best Western story I ever read in THE ARGOSY, in any magazine, was "Larkin of the Free Range." How about some more by the same author?

My experience with Jackson was progressive.

"The Third Act" I did not read, much to my later regret. After letting "Ambushed" lie round the house for a few months I finally started it—and finished it. I waited expectantly for "Winged Feet," and when it came—what a treat!

Now I am waiting again for "Red Robin" [somewhere about August, Gerald], and in the mean time reading Jackson in other magazines.

Have been waiting—yes, you may truthfully arrive at the conclusion that I am a near kinsman to Job—as I was saying—I have been waiting for another long story by Clinton H. Stagg. "Easy Money" I consider about the best story of its kind I have ever read.

Here's a little tip. Stagg can write dandy detective stories. Think it over.

George Washington Ogden, Captain Foran, Captain Rodney, Captain Harrington, and William Wallace Cook, I mention briefly, but soulfully. They are all masters of their craft, and I hope to read more of their work. My, if I had my way THE ARGOSY would be increased to about double its present size.

Why not have some novels by Stephen Chalmers? His plots, both in his long and his short stories, are original, with always an unexpected dénouement, and he is certainly master of his pen. He is one of the few good authors who is a stranger to the pages of THE ARGOSY.

And here is the last of my cherished suggestions. Why not add a page to the Log-Book, or half a dozen for that matter, and in this addition relate incidents in the life of some author, true, of course, or incidents making the plot of some story in that issue.

For instance, in "The Thing That Was Cæsar's" it seems improbable that the legend of the silver box could originate in a man's mind—not slighting Captain Rodney's intellect, but rather complimenting him in the convincing style of his narrative legend—if there is one, it could be given and the interest of the story enhanced. Then, too, the authors would be brought into closer touch with the reading public, and personal interest would be roused. What do you think of it?

I greatly enjoy your little skits in the Log-Book, Mr. Editor, and the first thing I do after reading the index page is to imbibe your monthly helpful and inspiring message and then digest the thoughts of other ARGOSY readers. Certain of the letters cause indigestion, to be sure, but I read them all, a slave to impulse, and frame regrets later. 'Scuse this hasty ending.

A. L.

Norton, Kansas.

The New and the Old

EDITOR, ARGOSY:

Am renewing my subscription to THE ARGOSY as I cannot be without it. Please give Fred Jackson as long a rest as possible and work Bedford-Jones overtime. What is the matter with having something more from Seward W. Hopkins and Albert Wiggins?

C. C.

Olivet, Michigan.

Better if Possible

EDITOR LOG-BOOK.

DEAR SIR:

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY since its start, and want to say that I think it is improving right along, if such a thing is possible. The June number is, to my notion, the best yet, as it contains several stories, mighty well written, about India, Japan, and other foreign countries, that we who have passed our lives in the interior learn little about except through the magazine stories. I would like to see more of this kind in THE ARGOSY.

There are plenty of writers of society stories, and mighty good ones, too, but few that can write of a foreign country as it really is.

Please give us more of them.

Your well-wisher,

J. R. G.

Tintic, Utah.

Why Kick?

DEAR EDITOR:

I can't see why people want to kick about the authors or stories in THE ARGOSY. I have read it for six years and wouldn't be without it. I think it is just the best magazine I ever read.

I like all of the writers, but Fred Jackson is one of my favorites. As I have never seen any one from this part of the country, thought I would write. If there is now and then a story I don't particularly

like, I haven't any kick coming, for it is sure to please some one else. You can't please everybody all the time.

I am perfectly satisfied, and wouldn't ask for a better book than THE ARGOSY, so here's wishing it a long and prosperous life, from

An ARGOSY lover,

R. McE.

Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Taking No Chances

EDITOR, ARGOSY:

The Log-Book is the first part of THE ARGOSY that I read each month, and I am glad to see that the Jackson fans are boosting him. I am a Jackson fan, and in my estimation Jackson is the captain of your army of good authors.

It was through one of Jackson's stories, "Winged Feet," that my wife realized that THE ARGOSY was something interesting to read. She declares that she will not miss another story in THE ARGOSY, and is going to read all the back numbers I have.

I can't understand how any one can criticise THE ARGOSY or any of the authors now. They are the best ever, and I think that we ARGOSY readers owe the editor a note of thanks for giving us the cleanest and best stories ever printed in a magazine.

I am taking no chances missing THE ARGOSY, and I enclose $1.50, for which please renew my subscription another year. I am,

Very truly yours,

S. L.

Covington, Ohio.

Good Work

EDITOR, ARGOSY:

"Gold Grabbers" is a fine story; tell Mr. Cook to keep up his good work. All the stories in THE ARGOSY are good. "The Thing That Was Cæsar's" beat "Gold Grabbers" all hollow.

Yours for THE ARGOSY,

H. C.

Fresno, California.

Outlandish Propositions

EDITOR, THE ARGOSY:

You publish everything good you receive in your Log-Book of THE ARGOSY. Do you also publish the adverse criticisms? I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for several years, but must say since you have changed to a complete story magazine some of your stories are N. G.

Take for instance in June—"The Thing That Was Cæsar's."

Of late you have had lots of this kind of articles. They must appeal to some of your readers, but I believe you will find more to condemn them than sanction this kind of story.

Your first story is generally good—generally worth the price of the book—but why not give us Americans the balance of the book we can understand, without all of these outlandish propositions?

Yours truly,

G. A. REAMS.

New York City.

A Better Rating than Ever

THE F. A. MUNSEY CO.,
THE EDITOR, THE ARGOSY.

DEAR SIR:

As a constant reader of THE ARGOSY'S crew for over twenty years, I have a little matter to bring to your attention which I trust you will straighten out at once.

When I received my May issue of THE ARGOSY (being a regular paid-up subscriber) I noticed with pleasure that our old friend, Captain S. S. Harrington was with us again, and having read his "Breaking Into West Point" with keen enjoyment, I settled in anticipatory pleasure to enjoy him in the shape of "Rosalind and the Forty Thieves."

After having gone half-way through what bid fair to be one of the most intensely interesting yarns THE ARGOSY has ever published (and I have read a few ARGOSY tales in my twenty years' association with it, believe me) imagine my surprise and chagrin to bump suddenly into a stone wall as exasperating as the wall of China, in the fact that in the binding my issue there was two inserts of pages 273 to 288 inclusive, and none at all of 289 to 304 inclusive.

Now, as this is too good a yarn to miss, and as I make a practise of saving all my issues of THE ARGOSY, I would request that you send me a perfect copy of the May ARGOSY so that I may go on with this very interesting yarn.

I notice that the old girl is carrying a richer cargo every voyage, and that she has a better rating than ever with the Lloyd's of public opinion through her making a complete shipment every trip and not making her patrons wait for the arrival of goods through several shipments.

I notice also she has had a new color to her hull lately, and while she always has carried a good cargo, still the old color was suggestive of other craft far below her rating at Lloyd's.

Well, keep a steady hand on the wheel, cap, and with her binnacle aglow she will plow her way safely and smoothly through the "Literary Sea" straight toward the beacon of "Success" to which she has made many a cruise, and thereby proved her perfect seaworthiness.

Far in the distance astern are the twinkling lights of "Home-Land," and the shouts of "*Bon voyage*" are wafted to us across the waters; eight bells are striking, and I go below to get a much-needed forty winks, but I will be on deck when we have "Success" light on our beam.

G. C. C.

Chicago, Illinois.

P. S.—Don't forget the matter I first spoke of.

No Better Treat

DEAR SIR:

I have been reading THE ARGOSY for several years, and have always liked it—now better than ever. I would like it still better if you cut out some short stories and put in another novelette.

The last two winters I have spent on a homestead, and I know of no better treat throughout the long and cold winter months than the arrival of THE ARGOSY.

I wish I could get it oftener. Next winter, when I go on the homestead again, I hope THE ARGOSY will come twice a month.

Yours truly,

O. B. G.

Margo, Sask., Canada.

Whatever You Do

EDITOR, ARGOSY:

Have read THE ARGOSY for a good while. Must say that it has improved greatly. Complete novels and novelettes are best. "Gold Grabbers" was fine. Whatever you do, give us more of Jackson.

Yours truly,

A. T.

Box 184, R. R. No. 4,
San Antonio, Texas.

A Testimonial

MESSRS. FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY,
175 Fifth Avenue,
New York City, N. Y.

GENTLEMEN:

I am eighty-one years of age, have traveled extensively, and during my varied life have read nearly all the leading periodicals of the day, including THE ARGOSY, since it was first published.

While the stories in it were interesting, I never had leisure to wait their completion while they were being issued as monthly serials. Now that your publication is complete in each number, I prefer THE ARGOSY to any other magazine published.

Any one with common sense must know that no editor can ever select stories that always will please everybody. There are enough in each issue to richly repay the readers and get their money's worth at fifteen cents a copy.

My own preference is to have you include several short stories in each number, together with the complete novel and two novelettes, as many readers have not leisure time to read the entire contents in each month. My own opinion is that you cannot improve the selections you make in each issue.

If you wish to publish this testimonial in the Log-Book you have my consent.

Very truly yours,

A SUBSCRIBER.

San Francisco, California.

Hurrah and a Tiger

EDITOR, THE ARGOSY:

Whoopee, hooray, hurrah, and a tiger. I just finished reading the Log-Book in the June ARGOSY, and I see you have thirty contributors; twelve of them are very strong for Jackson and the eighteen don't say a word about him; but they praise THE ARGOSY as a good magazine, so I think they are also very strong for Jackson.

Now you will have to break your promise to our friend Bennett and give us some more good stories of Mr. Jackson's. You said it was up to the fans of Jackson to get busy, and now they have got busy and it is up to you.

I did not see my last letter in the Log-Book, but I do not care, as there were a lot of better ones that I enjoyed reading. I changed my mode of reading THE ARGOSY for June. I always start at the beginning and save the Log-Book until last, but this time I could not wait. I am glad, too, because it was a pleasure to see Jackson in so many letters.

I have not heard any one say a word about Captain Harrington. I like his stories very much. In fact, all of the authors and stories in THE ARGOSY are A No. 1.

G. E. BONNER.

Springfield, Ohio.

A Heretofore Silent Passenger

EDITOR, THE ARGOSY:

I have been a silent passenger on your ship for some time, and have never made any noise, but when I heard H. Hargrave

on deck in the June ARGOSY, raking G. W. Ogden, it simply got on my nerves.

I think Ogden a star, and when I hear any one running him down I want to saddle my pet forty-five and go on a man hunt.

Ogden may write some little mushy love, but there is no tobacco smoke and silk gowns told about in every other line like his favorite, Freddie J. I have no kick on "Jack," for without him some of our readers would have no breakfast—those who like mush. I think Jackson is the best plotter I ever read, but has too much love. If his "Ambushed" had been set to a lively Western tune it would have been a corker.

So much for Fred. Has Howard Dwight Smiley been fed to the sharks? I see he is on deck no more. If you will keep a few short stories, such as Smiley's "A Bunch of Mountain Scenery," on deck, you will have no gale in Short-Story Bay.

I like to see you cut out the serials. Give us some more of A. P. Terhune and his historical yarns. I am glad to know Ogden is coming again.

Well, I will let Jackson rest, as all have taken a whack at him. As long as you keep your dear old ship in the shape it has been in the past you can always count on one first-class passenger no matter what the ticket costs. Luck to you and a peaceful voyage.

LUTHER STONE.

Blossom, Texas.

P. S.—Yes, before I forget to remember, keep G. W. Ogden and A. P. Terhune on deck.

Those Who Are All Right

EDITOR, THE ARGOSY:

As I have been a silent reader of THE ARGOSY so long I hardly know how to begin. Haven't missed a copy in five years. I want to say that our friend Jackson is all right. So is Bedford-Jones. I think Albert Payson Terhune's stories are fine, and above all things, give us a sequel to "The City of the Unseen." I am anxious to know what becomes of the others of the party after going down the stairway to the river.

Yours,

J. N. W.

Easley, South Carolina.

Since a Kid

EDITOR, THE ARGOSY:

How in Sam Hill you are going to improve THE ARGOSY, or any part of it, is a thing I doubt more than a little. I've read it since a kid and will continue.

You had one writer whose stories I miss very much. Tell me kindly why he is not still writing for you—William H. Greene—and oblige,

J. J. ROBERTS.

Stamford, Connecticut.

Favorites

EDITOR, THE ARGOSY:

Please give my congratulations to Mr. William Wallace Cook. His "Gold Grabbers" was certainly fine. Give us some more stories like that.

My favorite story was "The Waters of Strife." Another good story was "The First Law," by Fred Jackson. Please let us hear from Jackson again. His loss would be a calamity. I think THE ARGOSY is the best magazine on the market and I would not be without it for anything.

FRANK LYNN.

Madison Avenue,
Montgomery, Alabama.

All Good

EDITOR, THE ARGOSY:

I have been taking THE ARGOSY for years. It surely is the best magazine in existence. Could not be improved except by issuing semimonthly, cutting out the short stories, and by giving more long stories.

Whosoever kicks against Jackson doesn't know what they are talking about. Jackson—give us something more similar to "The First Law" or "Winged Feet." "An Enemy Hath Done This" was splendid. Your writers are all good, but please don't cut out Jackson.

If my vote should count—I say less short stories and ARGOSY semimonthly. The time seems so long between one magazine and another.

With many best wishes for success,

Yours truly,

J. M. MILLER.

Give us plenty of Western or mining stories. "The Well Shooters" was fine.

923 West Sixty-Second Street,
Los Angeles, California.

A Petition

EDITOR, THE ARGOSY:

I have been reading THE ARGOSY for some time. It can't be beaten at any price.

I should like to subscribe for it by the year, but cannot, as I am a traveling man.

Fred Jackson's stories are fine.

Please keep up the good work.

Yours very truly,

New York City. EARLE GORHAM.

"Ever-ready" ideal heating

When the first cold-rain, chill winds, fog or frost stops your vacation-outing and drives you hurriedly back to the city, how your home-coming is cheered by the knowledge that you have only to touch a match to a little kindling in the ever-ready IDEAL Boiler and within ten minutes feel the soft, June-like warmth distributed alike in every room and hall through the AMERICAN Radiators that stand like alert sentinels to guard you from every attack of raw or zero weather.

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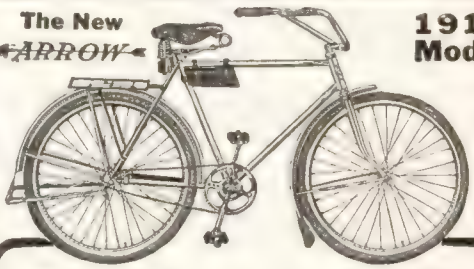

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Building Contractor	Advertising
Architectural Draftsman	Commercial Illustrating
Structural Engineer	Industrial Designing
Concrete Construction	Commercial Law
Mechan. Engineer	Automobile Running
Mechanical Draftsman	Teacher
Refrigeration Engineer	English Branches
Civil Engineer	Good English for Every One
Surveyor	Agriculture
Mine Superintendent	Poultry Farming
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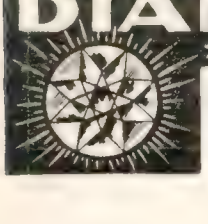

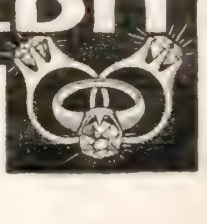

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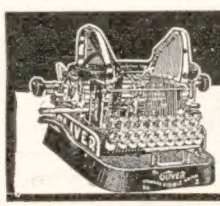

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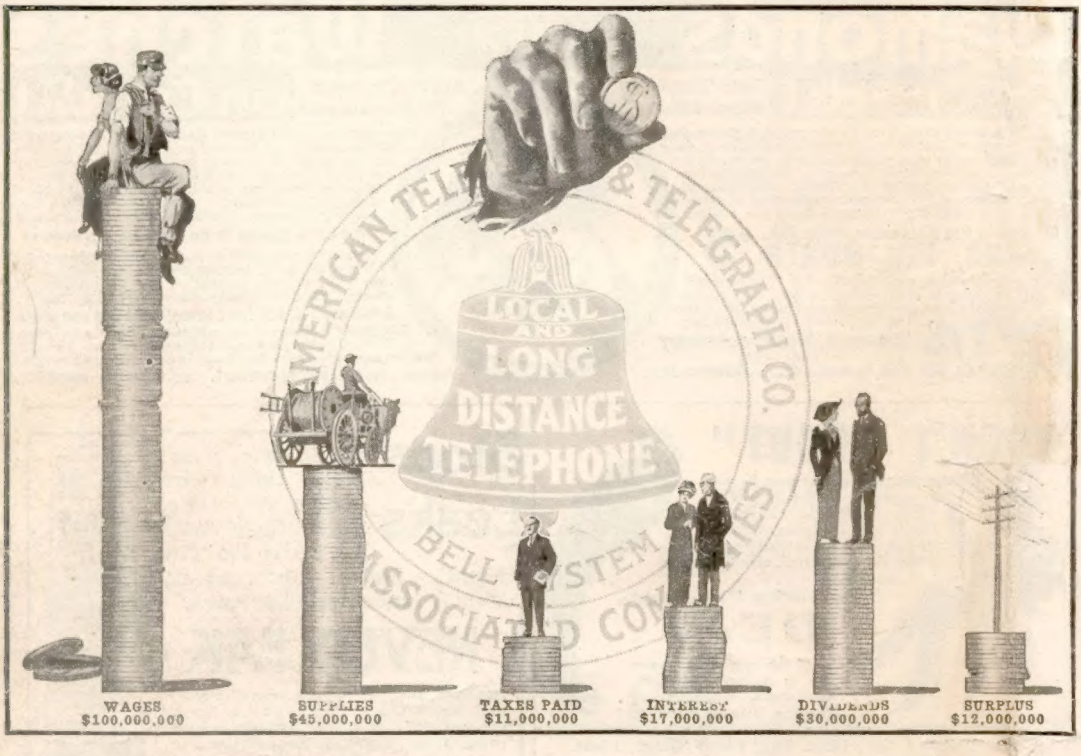

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(These payments to stockholders and bondholders who have put their savings into the telephone business represent 6.05% on the investment.)

Surplus—$12,000,000

This is invested in telephone plant and equipment, to furnish and keep telephone service always up to the Bell standard

AMERICAN TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH COMPANY

AND ASSOCIATED COMPANIES

One Policy *One System* *Universal Service*

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